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THEOLOGY

REVISED AND ENLARGED

A SERIES OF LECTURES

TIMOTHY DWIGHT, S.T.D., LL.D.

1840

A NEW COURSE OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR
AND A PORTRAIT

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THEOLOGY

EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED,

IN

A SERIES OF SERMONS,

BY

TIMOTHY DWIGHT, S.T.D. LL.D.

Late President of Yale College, Connecticut.

WITH

A MEMOIR OF THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,
AND A PORTRAIT.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. V.



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SERMON CXV.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

KILLING—WHEN LAWFUL, AND WHEN UNLAWFUL.

Thou shalt not kill.—EXOD. xx. 13.

IN the five preceding Discourses I have considered summarily several classes of duties involved in the fifth command. Had I no other object before me, beside the examination of this precept, I should feel myself obliged to investigate also the mutual duties of men in various other relations of life, particularly those of husbands and wives, masters and servants, ministers and their congregations. All these, together with the duties of friends and neighbours, of the aged and the young, are, I think, obviously included in this precept, and are of sufficient importance to claim, not only a discussion, but a more extensive and minute investigation, than I have given to those already examined. But a work of this nature, although it may seem large, must necessarily be compendious. The field is too vast even to be wandered over by any single effort, and many parts of it must be left unexplored by any traveller.

The command, which is given us in the text, is expressed in the most absolute manner: 'Thou shalt not kill.' To *kill*, is the thing forbidden; and by the words it is forbidden in all cases whatever. Whenever we kill any living creature, therefore, we are guilty of a transgression of this command, unless we are permitted to take away the life in question by an exception which God himself has made to the rule.

The consideration of the absolute universality of the command in the text, ought invariably to be remembered in all our comments upon it. These, it is

ever to be remembered, are the words which God himself has chosen. They accord, therefore, with the dictates of infinite wisdom concerning this subject, and bind us with infinite authority. Man cannot alter them. Man cannot lawfully originate an exception to them, nor in any other manner limit their import. Every comment upon them must, of course, be derived from the words themselves, or from other precepts, or from comments on this precept, found in other parts of the Scriptures. At the same time, a scrupulous attention to the words themselves will, if I mistake not, remove several difficulties concerning this subject, and contribute not a little towards settling finally some important doctrines of morality.

In examining this subject, I shall endeavour to point out,

I. *Those instances in which life may be lawfully taken away, agreeably to scriptural exceptions under this law ;*

II. *Some of those instances in which life is destroyed, in contradiction to this law.*

I. *I shall mention those instances in which life may be lawfully taken away under scriptural exceptions to this law.*

1. The life of *animals* may be lawfully taken away in two cases ; when they are necessary for our food, and when they are *hostile* and *dangerous* to us.

In Gen. ix. 3, ' God said to Noah and his sons, Every thing that moveth shall be meat for you : even as the green herb have I given you all things.' That this permission was necessary, we know, because it was given. But if it was necessary, men have no right to eat the flesh of animals before it was given. The same thing is evident, also, from the terms of the permission, ' Even as the green herb have I given you all things.' If God gave men all things, that is, all animals, to be their food, then men have no original, natural, or previous right to use them for food. Accordingly, the antediluvians, abandoned as they were, appear plainly never to have eaten animal food. Noah and his descendants began this practice, under this

permission. Here is found the only right of mankind to this food. Animals belonged originally and solely to their Creator. We, therefore, could have no right to their lives, unless he who alone possessed that right, had transferred it to us.

From these observations it is plain, that infidels, who deny the divine revelation of the Scriptures, can plead no right to eat the flesh of animals. The only being who can possibly communicate this right to us is God, since he is the only being who possesses the right to dispose of them. But God has nowhere communicated this right to mankind, unless he has done it in the Scriptures. But this communication they deny to have been made ; and are, therefore, without any warrant for the use of animal food. Nor can they ever make use of it, without contravening the dictates of a good conscience, and violating the plainest principles of justice and humanity.

The arguments by which infidels have endeavoured to defend this conduct in themselves, are, in my view, miserable fetches of a disingenuous mind struggling hard to justify itself in a practice which it is loth to give up, and not the honest reasons of fair conviction. They are these : ‘ It is the analogy of nature, that the stronger should prey upon the weaker ; that we feed animals, and have therefore a right to their lives, and their flesh, as a retribution for our kindness to them ; and that, if *we* did not destroy *them*, they would multiply in such a manner, as ultimately to destroy *us*.’

These reasons are characteristically suited to the mouth of a *wolf*, or a *tiger*, but proceed with a very ill grace from the mouth of a *man*. Were a savage, of superior force, to attack an infidel, plunder his property, and destroy his life, in order to convert his flesh into food : and were he, beforehand, to allege, as the justifying reason for this conduct, that it was the analogy of nature for the stronger to prey upon the weaker ; the argument, it is believed, would scarcely satisfy the infidel. Were the *ox* endued with speech, he might unanswerably reply to

the allegation, drawn from the kindness of men to oxen, that their labour was an ample compensation for their food ; and that men fed them for their own benefit, and not theirs. With respect to the third argument, he might ask, without fearing any reply, Where, and when, did oxen ever multiply in such a manner as to become dangerous to mankind ? If infidels can be satisfied with these arguments for the use of flesh, we can no longer wonder, that they are equally well satisfied with similar arguments against the revelation of the Scriptures.

The truth is, they are not thus satisfied with either the one or the other. Inclination, and not conviction, is probably the source of their conduct in both cases. Were they as scrupulous, as all men ought to be, they would, like the Hindoos, and even the antediluvians, abstain entirely from eating the flesh of animals.

Animals hostile and dangerous to men, God has not only permitted, but commanded, us to put to death ; at least whenever they have intentionally destroyed human life. In Genesis ix he says to Noah and his children, ‘ Surely your blood of your lives will I require : at the hand of every beast will I require it ; and at the hand of man.’ Agreeably to this law, which makes animals in this situation punishable with death, the ox, which gored a man, or woman, was commanded to be stoned. As the beast which had perpetrated this act could be punished only by men, men were required to put him to death. It will not, I suppose, be contended, that we are not warranted to anticipate this mischief, and prevent the tiger from shedding human blood, as well as to destroy him after his depredations are completed.

In all other cases we are unwarranted to take away the life of animals, because God has given us no warrant.

There are persons who destroy their domestic animals by compelling them to labour beyond their strength, or their capacity of enduring fatigue.

There are others, who beat them, under the influence of furious passions, in immoderate degrees, or afflict them by other exertions of violence and cruelty. There are others, who deny them the necessary food, and keep them continually half famished through hunger. There are others, who take away the lives of birds, fishes, and other small animals, for the mere purpose of indulging the pleasure of hunting, or fishing. And there are others still, who find an inhuman pleasure in merely distressing and torturing this humble and defenceless class of creatures. Of the first of these modes of cruelty, horse-racing is a scandalous example. A brutal specimen of the last is presented to us in cock-fighting.

'A righteous man,' says Solomon, 'regardeth the life of his beast,' Prov. xii. 10 ; that is, a righteous man realizes, in a just manner, the value of the life of his beast, entertains a steady conviction, that he has no right unnecessarily to shorten or embitter it ; and feels the solemn obligation which he is under, to use all the means dictated by humanity and prudence, for preserving the life of those animals which are under his care, and for rendering them comfortable.

In all these instances of cruelty, the life of animals is not immediately taken away. But in all of them it is either suddenly or gradually destroyed ; and often with greater cruelty, and more abominable wickedness, where the process is slow, than where it is summary. The spirit of this command is violated in them all.

Children, who are either taught, or permitted, to exercise cruelty towards animals in early life, are efficaciously fitted in this manner to exercise cruelty towards their fellow-men. If they escape the dungeon, or the gibbet, they will be little indebted for this privilege to those who had the charge of their education. It is remarkable, that the law which punished murder with death, was immediately subjoined to the permission to take the life, and eat the flesh, of animals. In this fact, if I mistake not, the Creator has taught us, that the transition from shed-

ding *their* blood, to shedding that of *man*, is so short and obvious, as to render a new law necessary for the prevention of murder ; a law which, it would seem, had not been demanded by the circumstances of preceding ages.

2. *The life of man may also be lawfully taken away in certain cases, according to the Scriptures.*

(1.) *This may be done, when this act is necessary for our own defence.* A sufficient warrant for this is given us in the case of the *thief*, mentioned Exod. xxii. 2, ‘ If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die ; there shall no blood be shed for him.’ In this case, the thief was killed in the defence of a man and his family ; and the act of killing him is plainly warranted. By parity of reason, the warrant extends to all cases, which in substance compare with this. In other words, we are justified in putting to death the person who assails the life of ourselves, or others, wrongfully, whenever our own defence, or theirs, makes it necessary.

In every case of this nature, we are, however, indispensably bound to be sure, that we act only in the defence of ourselves or others ; and that there are no perceptible means, beside this extreme one, of warding off the threatened evil. Wherever such means exist, it is our indispensable duty to employ them. We are bound, also, in no case to take away life for an injury already done ; and in the indulgence of anger, malice, or revenge. At the same time, if the right invaded, or the injury to be done, is of moderate importance, we are prohibited from proceeding to this extremity.

On *this ground alone*, that it is an act of *self-defence*, can *war* be justified. Aggressive war is nothing but a complication of robbery and murder. Defensive war is merely the united efforts of several persons to defend themselves against a common inroad, or enemy. It is therefore equally lawful with self-defence in an individual. By aggressive war, here, I do not intend that which is first commenced under the name of war ; but the original outrage, or

series of outrages, out of which the war has lawfully arisen, on the part of the injured nation.

A numerous, and on many accounts respectable, class of Christians, the *Friends*, have denied the lawfulness of war. It is to be wished that the world would universally adopt the practice of these pacific men. But, so long as the present disposition of mankind predominates—so long as men will attack and destroy the life, liberty, and property of their fellow-men—defensive war is absolutely necessary, and absolutely lawful. A nation which should adopt the contrary doctrine, would be undone. *This society of Christians could not possibly exist in a national state.* The province of Pennsylvania, and perhaps the rest of the British colonies together with it, came very near being finally destroyed by the prevalence of this very doctrine in its House of Representatives. Such a nation would publicly proclaim itself an unresisting prey to the rest of mankind; and, like the deer, would become a victim to the fangs of the wolf and the tiger.

That war is lawful in the abstract, we know with certainty; because it has been directly commanded, unequivocally approved, and miraculously prospered, by God. He commanded Israel to make war upon Amalek, until the name of that guilty nation should be blotted out from under heaven. In the same manner, he commanded them to make war upon the inhabitants of Canaan; and approved of their conduct in making war upon that people. In the same manner, he commanded the Israelites to make war repeatedly upon Midian and upon Habor; censured the tribe of Reuben, and by his angel commanded the Israelites to 'curse Meroz,' because they neglected or refused to make active exertions in this war. He also miraculously aided the Israelites against Midian, Amalek, the Philistines, and others. See *Exod. xvii. 8; Judges vii.; 1 Sam. vii.; and 2 Sam. v.*

But all that has been commanded, approved, and miraculously prospered by God, is in itself right.

For it is impossible that God should either command or approve of that which is wrong. The only question, therefore, which can be rationally made in this case, is, *In what circumstances is war lawful?* With this question it cannot be supposed, that I have here any concern.

(2.) *The life of man may be lawfully taken away, when by crimes it has been forfeited to the law of the land.*

Mankind are commanded, in the original law concerning murder, given us in Gen. ix. to put the murderer to death. 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.' In the Mosaic code the same punishment is annexed to a variety of crimes: such as adultery, filial stubbornness, idolatry, and several others. In each of these cases men are *required* to take away human life, as the proper punishment of a crime by which it has been forfeited; and are not merely *warranted* to do this by a *permission*. In the former case, the command is addressed to all men. Accordingly we find it repeated by Solomon, as a universal precept, in the most absolute terms. 'A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person, he shall flee to the pit: let no man stay him.' It is also made a part of the Jewish law in various places. Exod. xxi. 12. 14; Lev. xxiv. 17; and very comprehensively, Numb. xxxv. 16, &c. In the latter cases, the command is addressed to the Israelites. The Jewish law is binding upon other nations, only in those cases whose nature is unchangeable and universal; or in those in which the circumstances are precisely the same. Still, this law is a complete proof of the absolute rectitude of that conduct which it prescribes. For God cannot possibly prescribe that which is wrong. The same law also teaches, that in the same circumstances the same conduct may, with the strictest propriety, be pursued by us. For God cannot command that which, in the given circumstances, is unwise. It is evidently lawful therefore for other nations, as well as the Jews, to put men to death for other crimes beside murder.

But in every case of this nature, we are, in my view, forbidden by the general spirit of the gospel, and, as I apprehend, by the plain dictates of reason also, to take away life, wherever a milder punishment may be safely substituted. Murder, we are bound invariably to punish with death. For every other crime a milder penalty may, and ought to be, adopted, whenever it will answer the proper ends of punishment. All evils which are suffered beyond the necessary purposes of penal jurisprudence, are suffered gratuitously; or, in other words, without any justifying cause. In this case the infliction ceases to be justice, and becomes oppression.

It is ever to be remembered, that, even when the punishment of death is lawfully to be inflicted, it can be warrantably executed only by the magistrate; and by him only when acting according to the decisions of law. Private individuals have no more right to interfere, than if the man condemned were innocent; and were they to lay violent hands on him, although proved to be guilty, and rightfully condemned, they would themselves become murderers. Nor can the judge lawfully condemn any man, whatever he may think concerning the rectitude of the decision, unless upon adequate legal testimony, fairly exhibited in open court, and in exact conformity to the modes of trial, by law established. Neither can the executive magistrate warrantably do any thing, in a case of this nature, beside merely executing the sentence of the judge; whether he esteems that sentence just, or unjust. The time, the manner, and the circumstances of execution, ordered by law, he is bound exactly to observe. A criminal although condemned to death, may, instead of being executed, be murdered; and that as truly as any other man. The sheriff also can easily lay aside the character of a magistrate, and assume that of a murderer.

At the same time, all magistrates, in whatever station they act, are indispensably prohibited from the exercise of hatred, or revenge, in every form and

degree, against the criminal. Magistrates here, as well as elsewhere, are 'ministers of God for good' to his people. In the awful employment of executing penal justice, it is their unalterable duty to exercise the benevolence of the gospel; to be exactly just, and faithful; and to 'rule in the fear of God.' As instruments in his hands, disposed conscientiously to do that, and that only, which is required by his will, and demanded by the public safety, they will be approved by him; and ought ever to be highly honoured by their fellow-citizens. But, if they turn aside from their duty, and indulge their own passions, instead of obeying the dictates of public justice, they assume the character of oppressors, and lay aside that of rulers, merit the severest censures of their fellow-men, and prepare a terrible account of their 'stewardship' against the final day.

II. *I shall mention several instances in which life is destroyed in contradiction to this command.*

Of these, the only one which I shall mention at the present time, is that which is appropriately called, murder; usually defined *the killing our neighbour with premeditated malice.*

On this subject, so long, so often, and so thoroughly canvassed, so perfectly understood, and so harmoniously considered by mankind, it cannot be necessary to dwell. I shall dismiss it therefore with the single observation, that the very necessity of forbidding this crime, a necessity daily and unanswerably manifested, is a most dreadful proof of the excessive depravity of man.

I shall now proceed to make several observations, more necessary, and more instructive to this audience, concerning several crimes, more or less intimately connected with this subject.

1. *All those actions which involve murder, are undoubtedly of the same nature.*

Such are the burning of a house, supposed by the incendiary to be inhabited; making a dangerous leak in a ship having men on board; shooting or casting the instruments of death into a crowd; trea-

son, rebellion, and other acts of a similar nature. It is to no purpose here for the perpetrator to allege, that death may possibly not be the consequence of his nefarious conduct. Had he any other regard to the value of human life, and to the sacred obligation which he is under, not only not to invade, but to preserve it, beside what a murderer feels, he would never be guilty of the conduct, nor think of this reason as a justification of it. A bare possibility of this nature must be alleged, if alleged at all, not to convince, but to affront the understanding.

2. *Under this head are also included all those actions by which the life of man is destroyed through a criminal negligence.*

There are many cases in which we may easily foresee that the death of others will be a consequence of our negligence. A sacred regard to the value of human life duly felt by us, would necessarily produce that attentive care which, so far as is in our power, would ensure safety to the lives of our fellow-men.

3. *To contrive the death of others is a crime of the same general nature.*

The crime of murder lies in the dispositions and designs of the heart. To constitute us murderers in the sight of God, it is not necessary, that we should be guilty of any overt act whatever. It is amply sufficient to contrive the death of others. So plain is this truth, that it has been generally acknowledged by mankind. The real and the prime guilt, probably, almost always lies here. The providence of God not unfrequently prevents the contrivance from being executed. But the contriver is still a murderer in his sight.

4. *To wish the death of others, although we form no plans for accomplishing it, is a crime of the same general nature.*

‘He who looketh on a woman to lust after her, saith our Saviour, ‘hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.’ By parity of reason, wishes indulged against the life of our neighbour are the commission of murder. There are probably

many persons who secretly wish the death of their fellow-men, and who yet never form, nor think of forming, any plan to accomplish their death. Most, if not all of these, perhaps, feel little remorse at the remembrance of their conduct, and probably rarely suspect themselves of being even remotely concerned in transgressing this command. Every such person is grossly deceived, and will be found charged with the guilt of murder at the final judgment.

5. *To wound our neighbour, and deprive him of the use of his limbs, or faculties, is a crime of the same nature; though, I acknowledge, of inferior guilt.*

Although to destroy another's limbs is not to take away his life, it is yet to take away a part of the usefulness and comfort which make life desirable. We may continue to live, when we are rendered chiefly useless, and unhappy. But life itself, so far as this world is concerned, must be of little value to the possessor. Nor can it easily be believed, that he whose malevolence can be gratified by depriving his neighbour of his limbs, or other peculiarly important blessings, would, under a little additional provocation, be reluctant to take his life.

6. *Quarrelling and fighting are crimes evidently of the same nature.*

A great part of the murders committed in this world are merely the conclusions, or catastrophes, of these crimes. So evident is this, that nothing is more common with respect to an existing quarrel, than to hear the persons who mention it express their apprehensions that it may terminate in murder. Indeed, the spirit which begets contentions of this nature is only an inferior degree of that which malignantly destroys the life of man. 'The beginner of strife,' says Solomon, 'is as when one letteth out water:' an evil, the degree, the mischiefs, and the end of which can never be anticipated by the human mind.

7. *All violent, unreasonable anger, envy, and hatred, are evils of the same nature.*

Christ, in commenting on the sixth command, says,

'Whosoever shall be angry with his brother, without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool' (or, as Doddridge seems inclined to render it, 'Thou villain'), 'shall be in danger of hell-fire.' St. John, in a manner more summary, and still more explicit, observes, 'He that hateth his brother is a murderer.' From these passages it is evident, that all the several things which I have considered as involved in the general crime of murder, or as acts of disobedience to this precept, are actually of this general nature. They are not, indeed, all marked with the same malignity as the crime usually known by this name. But they all partake of the same nature, and are either murder in the proper sense, or steps which lead directly to it; seeds, impregnated with that very poison which, more perfectly concocted in the future growth of the plant, becomes so rank and so fatal to the life of man.

Finally: I hesitate not to pronounce that *unkindness*, which, especially when exercised towards *inferiors* and *dependants*, wears upon the *spirits*, and often *breaks the hearts of our fellow-creatures*, to be a crime of the same nature.

In order to shorten human life, it is not necessary to use a bludgeon, nor a pistol. Servants may be easily brought to an untimely grave by stinting them with respect to their necessary food, clothes, lodging, or fuel; or by a repetition of tasks unreasonably burdensome. A delicate and susceptible child may be easily driven into a consumption by parental coldness, fretfulness, severity, the denial of necessary indulgences, or the exaction of undue compliances. Mere conjugal indifference may easily break the heart of an affectionate wife. Faithless friendship may destroy at once the life of a friend. Ungrateful subjects have shortened the life of an affectionate ruler by their ingratitude merely. Rulers have, probably, in millions of instances, put their subjects to death, without any immediate violence, by the

gradual but sure operations of a comprehensive and hard-handed oppression.

From these observations it is evident, that murder, in the proper sense, is begun in unkindness; and that unkindness is begun in the early and unrestrained indulgence of human passions. This indulgence, therefore, parents, and all other guardians of children, are bound faithfully to restrain from the beginning. The first tendencies towards cruelty, the first evidences of an unfeeling disposition, should be repressed, discouraged, and, as far as may be, destroyed. Tenderness, on the contrary, a spirit of general benevolence, and an active, affectionate beneficence to others, should be cultivated in every child, with care, sedulousness, and constancy, resembling that with which an impassioned florist watches, nurses, and cherishes a choice flower, procured with great expense from a distant climate, his own favourite possession, pre-eminent for its fragrance and beauty, and regarded by him as the pride and boast of the country in which he lives.

SERMON CXVI.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

DUELLING.

Thou shalt not kill.—EXOD. XX. 13.

In the preceding Discourse from these words I proposed to point out,

I. *Those instances in which life may be lawfully taken away, agreeably to scriptural exceptions under this law;*

II. *Some of those instances in which life is destroyed in contradiction to this law.*

The first of these heads I discussed at that time and made several observations under the second.

The remaining subjects included in this division, are *duelling*, *suicide*, and *drunkenness*. The first of these, *viz. duelling*, shall be the topic of immediate investigation.

That duelling is a violation of the command in the text, is evident,

1. *From the words of the precept itself*; 'Thou shalt not kill.'

I have already observed, that these words contain a command entirely absolute, without either condition, or exception. I also observed, that, as this is a command of God, man cannot, without impious presumption, attempt to limit it; and that no other exceptions, therefore, can be made to it, beside those which God himself has made. But God has made no exception which the most ingenious mind can so construe, as to render it, even in the most remote degree, favourable to duelling. As this assertion will neither be denied nor doubted, it will only be necessary to add, that this precept stands in full force against duelling; and that every duel is a gross violation of its whole authority.

Nor is this all; duelling is a violation of this precept of the very worst kind; superior in its guilt to most other crimes of the same nature, and inferior to none. For,

2. *A duel is always the result of a design to take away human life.*

I say *always*. It is not, however, my intention to deny, that there may be exceptions to this general declaration. But these are probably as few as to any general rule concerning human conduct. The challenge originally contains a proposition to kill, or to be killed. It is accepted with an expectation of killing, or of being killed. Each of the combatants also takes his aim at the seat of life, and intends to destroy his antagonist, if he can. No pretence, therefore, is more unfounded, than that duellists do not design to kill each other.

3. *Duelling always involves efforts to destroy life.*

The weapons used in it are always the proper in-

struments of death; and they are used with the utmost skill and care which the parties possess, for the direct purpose of producing this dreadful catastrophe.

4. *Men are put to death in duels with more deliberation than in almost any other case whatever.*

The challenger has always ample opportunity to deliberate, before he gives the challenge. This opportunity also, it is reasonably supposed, he extends as far as he pleases, both because the case is of the utmost importance to himself, and because he manages it according to his own choice. To him it is entirely optional, whether he will fight at all; and, when he has determined this point, at what time he shall give the challenge. Whatever time, therefore, he chooses to take for consideration, he actually takes; and this he himself will not deny to be a sufficient time. During this period, also, the subject, being of the highest importance, and necessarily making the strongest impressions, must be often, if not always, in his mind; must therefore be viewed in its various lights, and must receive all the examination which such a mind is capable of giving to subjects of the highest consequence. Of course, a duel is invariably the result, if it be not the challenger's own fault, of the most ample deliberation. It must be his own fault also if this deliberation be not cool and thorough. All these observations, it is to be remembered, are applicable with the same force to the person challenged.

5. *Duelling is, probably, always perpetrated with a spirit of revenge.*

I say *probably* always. For that this is usually the fact no sober man can doubt for a moment. To me it seems inconceivable, that any man, whatever may have been his feelings in the earlier parts of this transaction, should go into the field, and employ himself in the several measures adopted by duellists for the purpose of taking away each other's lives, and not be under the influence of predominating passions. These passions can be no other than hatred

and revenge. If we trace this subject with **even a** moderate degree of attention, from its commencement to its close, it will, I think, be impossible for us to adopt any other opinion. The challenger receives, or at least believes himself to have received, an injury (of what kind is a matter of perfect indifference) sufficiently great to demand of him the exposure of his own life to probable destruction, and the death, so far as he is able to compass it, of the injurer. Now, let me ask, and let every sober man answer the question, whether an injury, felt to be of **this** magnitude, was ever regarded, or can possibly be regarded, by such men as duellists always are, without strong feelings of wrath and revenge? Duellists, every one knows, are men pre-eminently proud, haughty, insolent, and proverbially irritable; jealous to an extreme of what they call their own rights; disdaining to have them determined, as those of other men are, by tribunals of justice. They regard the forgiveness of injuries, and all the peaceful and gentle virtues of man, with supreme contempt; and claim to themselves, in opposition to the laws of God and their country, the adjudication of their own disputes, and the retribution of their own injuries. What should hinder a man of this character from indulging or executing revenge in any case, especially in a case of this importance? The rectitude of revenge is a prime principle of his creed; a principle to which he adheres with such tenacity and uniformity, as, in a better cause, would do honour to the most exemplary Christian. He does not come to the consideration of this subject with doubts concerning the rectitude, or a conviction of the sinfulness of revenge; **but with a determination**, long since established, and never called in question, that it is right; a determination, to which he gives the extensive and commanding influence of **a maxim**. From the indulgence and the execution of revenge, he is restrained therefore by no moral consideration whatever. On the contrary, it is sanctioned by the very first principles of his morality

Of course, it becomes his boast ; and is regarded by him as a part of his moral worth ; as the ornament and glory of his character. It is evident then that there is nothing to hinder him from the indulgence of this passion in any case ; especially in a case to which he attaches this high importance.

Should it be said, that the injury in question is not considered as being of such magnitude ; but that the laws prescribed by duellists to themselves compel a man of honour to resent injuries, which they themselves esteem small, in this manner : I answer ; that the injury, how insignificant soever it may be in reality, is still such in the estimation of duellists as to subject the challenger, unavoidably, to this exposure, and to all the evils by which it is followed. In this view only it is regarded by him ; and all the resentment, all the feelings of revenge, naturally flowing from an injury of this magnitude, will be awakened in his breast.

In the mind of the challenged the same emotions will be roused, of course, by the challenge itself. The challenge, in his view, infers the same obligation on his part to expose his own life, and either to lose it, or destroy that of his antagonist. Against his antagonist, therefore, all that hostility will be excited in his mind, which is the natural result of such an injury. Now, let me ask any man of common candour, whether it is credible, that in two men thus circumstanced, strong feelings of revenge will not of course be kindled ? They are men, not only wrathful and revengeful in their nature, but glorying in the indulgence of wrath and revenge. They openly declare the exercise of these passions in this extreme manner to be right, honourable to themselves, and ornamental to the human character. For this very exercise of these passions they esteem themselves superior to other men ; style themselves ‘ brave,’ ‘ men of honour,’ and ‘ gentlemen ;’ and name others ‘ cowards,’ ‘ scoundrels,’ and ‘ rascals.’ Is it possible that, habitually entertaining these opinions, and habitually indulging these passions, they should

not exercise them peculiarly on such an occasion?

I well know, that duellists profess themselves to be free from these passions in cases of this kind; and declare, that they proceed to these horrible encounters with entire coolness and good nature. These professions, however, have not the most distant claim to credit. All men who feel themselves exposed to the censures of mankind, endeavour to rebut them in the best manner in their power. Fair professions are the most obvious means of rebutting them. In the same manner, the bully conceals his cowardice, and the hypocrite his irreligion; and both have as good claims to be believed, as the duellist. Cool, indeed, he may be in some instances; that is, not agitated by fear; but every thing in his situation and in his conduct proves, that he is angry and revengeful.

6. *Duellists take the utmost pains to prepare themselves for this dreadful employment.*

In places where duelling is generally practised, it has become a regular employment; and may be fairly considered as a branch of the regular education of children and youths, to acquire skill and adroitness in the art of destroying human life by this species of violence. Children, at a very early period, employ themselves daily and yearly, through long periods of time, in shooting with pistols; and acquire skill by this practice, just as penmanship is acquired; with as much coolness, and with as much success. Men also, who have not received this education in early life, employ the sober years of maturer age in learning the same horrid art. To excel in it is regarded, by the adept himself, and his fellows, as an attainment of high distinction. To be able to split a ball upon the edge of a knife, or extinguish a candle with a pistol ball, at the distance of the utmost goal of duelling, is, in the view of these men, to have arrived at glory not a little resembling that of Turenne, or Marlborough.

In all this conduct is seen, with the slightest glance, a deliberate design, a cold-blooded system, of taking

away the life of man with the hand of violence ; a design, a system, begun in childhood, and cherished, cultivated, and perfected through every succeeding period. What dupe of credulity can be so absolutely blind to the whole nature of evidence, as not to see in this conduct, designs equally hostile against human life, more deliberate, and certainly not less guilty, than those of the *professed assassin* ?

7. *The duellist takes away the life of his neighbour without a cause.*

In this respect, the murderer, in the appropriate sense, nay, the professed assassin, can, in many instances at least, more speciously justify himself than the duellist. The murderer attacks his victim under the domination of furious passion ; at the moment when he has lost the possession of reason and conscience, and the consequent government of himself ; under the consciousness of a real and intense injury ; or with the hope of delivering himself from a persecutor. Brutus expected to free his country from a tyrant ; and Charlotte Corde, to deliver her's from another. These, I acknowledge, are far from being solid or justifying reasons ; yet they are specious. They are such as, in the moment of provocation and bitterness, would have great weight, and go far, in the phrenetic mind of a man violently in a passion, towards vindicating him to himself. But the duellist is roused to battle by a *contemptuous look*, a *slight word*, or some other wound given to mere pride. All these and the like things are perfectly harmless, if passed by with serenity and self-possession. At the worst, they are mere expressions of the opinion which the provoking person entertains of our character ; an opinion which, if we are faithful to ourselves, can do us no harm ; and which usually merits nothing but disregard, contempt, or pity. This the duellist has ample time to investigate, and to know : for the very manner of executing his resentment postpones the execution beyond the ordinary period of violent passion. Every duellist must confess, unless he will acknowledge his whole

life to be a paroxysm of rage, that the seasons in which he acquires the skill of directing surely the weapons of death, in which he determines to become a professed duellist, in which he settles the principles, and learns the rules of his profession, in which he fixes in his mind the proper causes of a challenge, the proper motives for fighting, and the proper modes of conducting it, are not seasons of violence and provocation. He will confess, that the time of his future life, independently of the little periods of actual combat, which he spends in avowedly professing his deliberate intention of acting as a duellist on every occasion which he thinks a proper one, is not a time of agitation, wrath, and partial insanity.

Nor is the duellist more happy with respect to the *final cause* of his conduct, or the end which he expects to accomplish by this species of controversy.

Reparation for an injury received, is commonly alleged as this end. But the death of his antagonist furnishes no such reparation. His neighbour's loss of life lessens in no manner nor degree any injury which he has received from him; and cannot possibly restore to him lost property, or lost reputation. The fact, that he has challenged and killed a man, will make him neither richer, nor more honourable, nor more happy. He may, indeed, acquire honour in the opinion of a few men, as foolish, unprincipled, and abandoned as himself. But the good opinion of these men is disgrace. In the view of every wise and good man he renders himself deeply shameful, and supremely guilty. He may, perhaps, enjoy what men of furious passions sometimes call happiness; *viz.* the fell pleasure found by such men in revenge. That revenge is sweet to the taste of a bad man, I am not disposed to question. But it is bitter and dreadful in the end. Let the duellist remember, that God hath said, 'To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense:' that he has forbidden us to 'avenge ourselves;' or to 'bear any grudge against our neighbour:' subjoining this solemn and authoritative reason, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay

it.' Let him read and ponder the parable of the servant who owed ten thousand talents ; and, when he finds that servant ' thrust into prison and delivered over to the tormentors,' as his final and irrevocable doom, let him ask himself what will become of him who, instead of imprisoning his fellow-servant, puts him to a violent death, and sends him into eternity, with all his sins upon his head ? Then let him farther ask, whether the pleasure of revenge is sufficiently great to balance the immense hazard, which he incurs for the sake of his gratification ?

In the mean time, a duel allowing that it should terminate in the *death* of him who gave the provocation, *alters not in the least the state of the supposed injury, nor of him who received it.* If he has been charged with cowardice, and is really a coward, he will still remain so. If he is not, the charge will not make him a coward. If he has been charged with lying, and has really lied, he will still remain a liar, unless he becomes an honest man by repentance and reformation. If he has not lied, the charge can never seriously affect his reputation, nor persuade a single sober man to believe him a liar. Men, in this country at least, have usually little to fear from such charges as these. If they will be faithful to themselves ; if they will exhibit the virtues which are denied to them, on all such occasions as call them into exercise ; and renounce or avoid the opposite vices, the world, bad as it is, will almost always discern their true character, and will most generally do justice to it. Sometimes, I acknowledge, they may, even while they exercise a good degree of patience, smart under the lash of unmerited censure. These reasons, however, can rarely be of long continuance ; and while they last, will to a wise man, in most cases, be eminently profitable, by teaching him to moderate the inordinate attachment, so commonly, so foolishly, and so dangerously indulged, to the applause of mankind. This is one, and in my view the chief, exercise of that ' love to the world, which the Scriptures declare to be in

compatible with 'love to God.' The effectual mortification of this attachment, strange as it may seem to the duellist, would yield him more serene, unmingled, and enduring pleasure, than all that which has been found in all the gratifications furnished by duelling since the beginning of time. Let the duellist also remember, that in this very act of attempting to destroy his neighbour's life, he more grossly injures his own character, than ten thousand charges, such as those which he thus furiously resents, could possibly do. In the view of every man of sober reflection, he brands upon his character the stamp of murder, the blackest mark of infamy, which can be worn by man.

But it will be replied to these observations by the duellist, that the *anguish* which he suffers is such as he cannot possibly bear; and that there is no way in which he can render life even *supportable*, under such an imputation on his character, without taking the life of the slanderer. This plea has been often seriously made. I will therefore examine it.

(1.) *The allegation contained in it is untrue.* The anguish complained of might be easily supported, without the death of its author. There are no words which more frequently delude those who use them, than *can* and *cannot*, *possible* and *impossible*. We often say and believe, that we *cannot* do that, which we merely *will not*; and frequently pronounce that conduct to be *impossible* which is only *very disagreeable*. The apostles, and the Christian martyrs of every age, were, in many instances, possessed of as much understanding and sensibility, and therefore understood the nature of the injuries which they received as well, at least, as the duellist in question, and felt them as deeply. Yet they bore slanders more gross, more frequently repeated, more extensively believed, and continued through a much longer duration. They bore them also without repining, often without complaining, and always without sinking. Women also, of extreme delicacy, and exquisite sensibility have sustained, not with patience only, but with

fortitude also, the most brutal accusations. Certainly a man who boasts so much of his firmness of character, as a duellist always does, must be ashamed of possessing less hardihood than women and Christians.

(2.) *This anguish chiefly is voluntarily created by himself.* It is nothing but the pain of wounded pride; a passion more injurious to his peace, and more hostile to his moral character, than the slander which he feels so deeply; a passion which, if he were a wise and good man, he would use every hopeful exertion to mortify and subdue. Independently of the feelings occasioned by this passion, the slander of which he complains would do him very little harm.

But he has been called *a coward*. So have thousands and millions of others, who regarded the imputation only with sport. But he has been called *a liar*. So have vast numbers of the best men who have ever lived; who, though not insensible of the slander, have nevertheless passed quietly on through life, in much the same manner as if it never had been uttered. Were the duellist possessed of the same spirit, he would feel as little anguish from this source as they felt. The whole difference between him and them is created, both foolishly and sinfully, by his own pride.

(3.) *The murderer, in the appropriate sense, can usually make the same plea, in his own behalf, and with more force.* It cannot be doubted, that, in the hour of extreme provocation and abuse, such as awakens, for the first time, the dreadful purpose of murder, an agitation must be felt, and an anguish suffered, far more intense than that which is ordinarily experienced by the duellist. He has made it a part of his general system, and a deliberate purpose, to destroy human life. To a mind thus prepared, no event of this nature can come wholly unlooked for, or be, as in the other case, a matter of mere and absolute surprise. A mind thus circumstanced can hardly suffer in the same degree from the very same

provocation. But the provocations usually given to the duellist are injuries far inferior in their degree to those which ordinarily excite in the human breast a purpose, so new to it, and so horrible, as murder. The duellist has been disciplined to this object, and comes to it with the cool feelings of a veteran. The murderer is a raw adventurer, who has never seen this terrible object in a near view before. He is therefore urged to the conflict by extreme provocatives only, with intense agitation, and with an impelling anguish, sufficiently great to overcome his dread and horror.

(4.) *The laws of the land provide, in the mean time, a reasonable reparation for all those injuries which the wisdom of legislators has thought it proper, or been able, to redress, and, at least, as ample reparation for him, as for his fellow-citizens.* With this reparation he is bound to be contented, until the legislature shall provide farther redress. If he has a right to adjudicate his own cause, and redress his own injuries, every citizen has the same right. But if this pretended right were to be universally exercised, government would be at an end. Anarchy, the real box of Pandora, would empty all its miseries upon mankind, and the nation be converted into a band of murderers. He who, in this plainest of all cases, will not 'submit to the ordinances of man for the Lord's sake,' will certainly receive the 'condemnation' which he has threatened.

(5.) *There are innumerable other cases, in which greater injuries are done to mankind than those which are done to the duellist, and in their nature far more distressing.* Those who have suffered them have therefore, according to this argument, a right to relieve themselves of their distress, by taking away the lives of those who have occasioned it. My neighbour, for example, has ejected me from my farm by an injurious lawsuit, and left me and my family beggars. He has accused me, as a merchant, of negligence, fraud, or bankruptcy; and, by bringing my creditors suddenly upon me, has not only stripped

me of my property, but precluded me from acquiring any more. He has negligently brought the small-pox into my family, and has thus produced the death of my child. He has impeached my Christian character, and has thus procured my excommunication from the church of Christ. All these injuries are incomparably greater than those which usually occasion duels. But who that has any conscience, or any common sense, will say, that I am warranted for any or all of them to put my neighbour to death. Who does not see that, were these and other injuries of a similar nature to be retributed in this manner, a nation would be converted into banditti, and their country into a field of blood?

8. *The duellist acts against the most powerful and persuasive reasons; unanswerably obliging him to abstain from this guilty conduct.*

(1.) *He most wickedly exposes his own life to destruction.* On this subject I shall not dwell at present, because I expect to consider the subject of suicide in the succeeding Discourse.

(2.) *He wickedly deserts the duties which he owes to his family and friends.* If he has parents, he owes them reverence, gratitude, strong affection, filial care in sickness and old age, support if they need it, and the innumerable consolations which that evil day so affectingly demands, and which none but a child is either able or willing to give. Particularly, he owes them that exquisite enjoyment, which is found in the affectionate, virtuous, and amiable conduct of our beloved offspring. If he has a wife, he owes her all that provision for her wants and for her comfort, the consolations in sickness and in sorrow, the kindness and tenderness, the faithful and affectionate attention to her happiness, which he has engaged in the marriage covenant; a covenant, involving substantially the same obligations with those of an oath. If he has children, he owes them sustenance, education in knowledge, business, and religion; his instructions, and his government, his example and his prayers. But all these duties, required by the infinite authority

of God, and in the two last cases voluntarily assumed also by himself, he basely deserts; and, by entering the field of slaughter, cuts *them* off from the possibility of receiving, and *himself* from the power of performing them. At the same time, he leaves them all buried through life in the hopeless agonies of remembering and feeling, that he voluntarily went ‘as an ox to the slaughter’—‘died as a fool dieth’—and, in the combined perpetration of suicide and murder, entered without a prayer, and without a hope of forgiveness, into the presence of his Judge.

But should he (a thing which he has no right to expect) survive the conflict, he survives only to present to his parents a son, to his wife a husband, and to his children a father, blackened with the guilt of cold, deliberate, murder. In the mean time, he has tempted his neighbour to the same enormous sin; and entailed upon *his* family and friends also the same tremendous evils.

(3.) *He does incalculable and irreparable injuries to his country.* He weakens the government of his country by practically adopting a principle which, if right in *him*, would be equally right in *all others*; and which, if adopted by *them*, would destroy social order in a moment: viz. *that an individual is to be his own judge in his own cause.* He injures his country also, by robbing it of the services and life of one of its members; in all probability more important, as the case may be, and has been, to its safety and welfare, than those of millions like himself. Finally, he injures his country boundlessly, as well as irreparably, in contributing by his opinions and example, to authorize, extend, and perpetuate the same baleful iniquity in his fellow-men.

REMARKS.

1. *The observations made in this Discourse present to us one of the strongest examples of human depravity.*

Life to man is his all. On it every thing is suspended which man can call his own: his enjoyments, his hopes, his usefulness, and his salvation. Our own

life is to us, therefore, invaluable. As we are most reasonably required to 'love our neighbour as ourselves;' his life ought, in our estimation, to possess the same value. In conformity to these views, mankind have universally regarded those who have violently deprived others of life, with supreme abhorrence, and branded their names with singular infamy. Murderers have been punished, in every age and country, with the most awful expressions of detestation, with the most formidable array of terror, and with the most excruciating means of agony. On the heads of murderers, at the same time, mankind have heaped curses without bounds. The city of refuge, nay, the altar itself, a strong tower of defence to every other criminal, has lost its hallowed character at the approach of a murderer, and emptied him out of its sacred recesses into the hands of the 'avenger of blood.' God hath said, 'A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person, he shall flee to the pit: let no man stay him.' In solemn response, the world has cried, 'Amen.'

But all these sentiments, all these rights, all the obligations of this law, the duellist has violated. Nay, he has violated them in cool blood, with the deliberation of system, in the season of serenity, in the tranquillity of the closet. This violation he has made a part of his creed, and settled purpose of his life; a governing rule of his conduct. All this he has done amid the various advantages of birth and education, under the light of science, with the Bible in his hand, and before the altar of his God. He has done it all also in the face of arguments, which have commanded the conviction of all mankind, except himself; and which would have convinced *him*, had his mind been honestly open to the force of argument. His opinions have been a thousand times exposed; his arguments have been a thousand times refuted. Against him have been arrayed in every Christian country, the common sense of mankind, the feelings of humanity, the solemn voice of law and the infinitely awful command of the eternal God.

With a moral hardihood, not often exemplified even in this world, he encounters them all, overcomes them all, and goes coolly onward to the work of destruction ; as coolly as if he were only performing a duty. How sinful must that heart be which can act in this manner !

2. *The government of every country is bound, indispensably, to punish duelling with exemplary severity ; and, wherever death has been the consequence, with death*

From the observations which have been made in this Discourse, it is clear, that few cases of murder occur among mankind equally atrocious, or equally deserving of death, with that which is committed in a duel. Every thing pertaining to this subject also tends towards this issue, as regular and uniform means towards their proper ends. The crime, being as gross and heinous as murder in other cases, deserves the same punishment. It is also far more dangerous to a community, than murder in the customary acceptation. The persons whom duelling especially threatens are, in many instances, persons of distinction ; formidable obstacles to the ambition of duellists ; persons, who by their influence and talents would naturally become important instruments of the public good ; persons, against whom the vulgar assassin rarely aims the stroke of his dagger. At the same time, the ravages of duelling are far more widely extended ; and the number of its victims is of course far more multiplied.

The manner in which God has judged concerning this subject is awfully displayed in the following passage : ‘ If a man smite any person with an instrument of iron, so that he die ; he is a murderer : the murderer shall surely be put to death. And if he smite him with throwing a stone, wherewith he may die, and he die ; he is a murderer : the murderer shall surely be put to death. Or if he smite him with an hand-weapon of wood, wherewith he may die, and he die ; he is a murderer : the murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer ; when he meeteth

him, he shall slay him. And if he thrust him of hatred, or hurl at him by lying in wait, that he die; or in enmity smite him with his hand, that he die; he that smote him shall surely be put to death: for he is a murderer. The revenger of blood shall slay the murderer, when he meeteth him. Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person, to cause him to die. Moreover, ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the high-priest. So ye shall not pollute the land, wherein ye are: for blood, it defileth the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it. Defile not, therefore, the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell; for I, Jehovah, dwell among the children of Israel.'

SERMON CXVII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

SUICIDE.

Thou shalt not kill.—EXOD. XX. 13.

THE next violation of this command which I shall have occasion to consider, is *suicide*, or *self-murder*. In examining this subject, I shall,

I. *Consider the principal arguments urged in justification of suicide; and,*

II. *Shall allege several proofs of its criminality.*

Before I proceed to the consideration of the arguments which have been supposed to justify suicide,

it will be necessary to observe, that there are two totally distinct classes of mankind, by which this crime is committed: those, who are labouring under the disease of melancholy, or that of derangement; and those who act in the same manner, in the full possession of their faculties. In the former of these classes the mental powers are so much disordered, as greatly to change, if not absolutely to annihilate, the criminality. The latter are guilty of this crime in the same sense as of any other. To the former class, it is obvious, arguments on this or any other topic can be of no use, if addressed to them, while under the influence of these infirmities. An habitual conviction of the turpitude of this crime, established in their minds, when possessed of their full strength and soundness, may indeed, and not improbably, so far influence them as to prevent this terrible catastrophe. In their diseased state, such of them as have fallen under my observation, have been incapable of being controlled by the force of argument. The observations which I shall make concerning this subject, will therefore be directed to those of the latter class: to men who, in the full possession of their reason, from sudden passion, from disappointment in the pursuit of some darling object, such as fame, power, wealth, or pleasure, the loss of some important enjoyment, the sufferance of some severe disgrace, or the dread of some expected evil, put an end to their lives. These men, though acting thus irrationally under the pressure of violent feeling, may yet be reasoned with in their cooler moments. In these moments a conviction may perhaps be wrought, and principles established in their minds, which may control the distempered thoughts, and prevent the dangerous decisions, too naturally springing up in seasons of violent agitation.

The general doctrine insisted on by Mr. Hume, the only writer whom I shall attempt to answer, or whom I consider as having any claim to an answer on this subject, is, *that man has a right to dispose of his own life.* This he asserts in various forms of ex-

pression ; all of them contributing to shew, that he considered this right as to be exercised according to the pleasure of the individual. Indeed, if such a right exists, the exercise of it cannot be limited in any other manner, unless the limitation be directly expressed by him, who alone can give or limit the right. But no such limitation has been expressed by him. In the Scriptures this is not even alluded to ; and, whatever proof the light of nature may furnish, that God has given us this right, there cannot be a pretence that it discovers to us any such limitation. The right itself therefore is to be exercised according to every man's judgment ; or, what will in this case be exactly the same, according to every man's pleasure.

But where is *the proof*, that God has given this right to mankind ? The arguments which Mr. Hume adduces to this purpose are chiefly the following :—

1. *That we were created for the end of effectuating our own enjoyment in the present life.* ‘Men,’ he says, ‘are intrusted to their own judgment and discretion, and may employ every faculty with which they are endowed, to provide for their ease, happiness, or preservation.’

In a former Discourse I have explained the end for which man was made ; and have, I trust, satisfactorily proved, that man was created to glorify his Maker, by knowing, reverencing, loving, serving, and enjoying him for ever. The accomplishment of this end in the creation of man, I have, unless I have been deceived, shewn to be in the highest degree honourable to God, and in the highest degree productive of happiness to man. That this end, whether the real end for which man was created, or not, is incomparably nobler, better, and more worthy of God, than the end proposed by Mr. Hume, which is no other than *the enjoyment of the pleasures of sense in this world*, cannot be denied. No more can it be denied, that of the ends which were capable of being answered by the creation of man, God selected that which was noblest, best, and most worthy

his character; unless it be also denied, not only that he is infinitely wise and good, but that he is wise and good at all. As therefore there are ends for which man might be created, nobler and better than that alleged by Mr. Hume, as one infinitely nobler and better has been pointed out, it is certain, that that proposed by him is not the true end of the creation of man.

Besides, the enjoyment of this pleasure in the manner exhibited by Mr. Hume himself, is inconsistent with the existence of virtue in man, and much more with the existence of perfect virtue. But to be virtuous is to render more honour to our Creator, to be more conformed to his pleasure, and to enjoy more happiness than is possible, if we are destitute of virtue. To be perfectly virtuous is to render the highest honour to our Creator, to be perfectly conformed to his pleasure, and to be perfectly happy. If then God regarded either himself, or us, he did not propose, as the end of creating man, the enjoyment of the happiness mentioned by Mr. Hume.

2. *Mr. Hume alleges, as another argument for this right, the insignificance of human life.*—‘In the sight of God,’ he says, ‘every event is alike important: and the life of a man is of no greater importance to the universe, than that of an oyster.’

Our Saviour informs us, on the contrary, that ‘men are of more value in the sight of God than many sparrows.’ Common sense irresistibly subscribes to the truth of this declaration. It is impossible to believe the contrary declaration. God unquestionably sees things as they are. But, as unquestionably, a mind possessed of the powers of thought, volition, and motivity; a mind capable of knowing, and in many instances actually knowing, loving, serving, and glorifying its Creator; a mind which can originate and diffuse important good to its fellow-creatures; a mind formed for immortal being, and destined to an endless improvement in knowledge, virtue, and enjoyment, is certainly of more value than many oysters. All this, however,

depends on the life of man. The life of man therefore is of more value than that of an oyster. Were it not, parents, so far as the light of nature teaches us, might, in agreement with the doctrine of Diogenes, and other cynics, lawfully roast and eat their children, as lawfully as they may now roast and eat oysters. A man of common sense would hardly be persuaded, that Moses, Paul, Louis the Good, the two Gustavuses, Alfred the Great, and Washington, were of no more importance to the universe than oysters. With a view, probably, to strengthen this allegation, Mr. Hume asks, 'Where is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood out of their channel?' By this question he undoubtedly intends, that his readers shall suppose suicide to be nothing more than merely diverting the course of a few ounces of blood. If Mr. Hume believed this, he deserved very little of that reputation which he has acquired for understanding. If he did not believe it, the question does very little honour to his candour or sincerity. It is no crime to turn a few ounces of blood out of their channel; often it is a duty; because it is the means of preserving, or restoring health. Many ounces of blood may be thus diverted from their course, and life be not only continued, but invigorated, and prolonged. In this case, the sphere of man's usefulness, and duty, and comfort, may in this world be enlarged, and his happiness in the world to come secured and increased. But the destruction of human life, by whatever means it is accomplished, terminates usefulness, duty, and comfort in the present world, and, if voluntarily accomplished, prevents the existence of happiness in the world to come. The difference between these things, as intended by Mr. Hume, is of course infinite. The phraseology, which appropriately expresses the one cannot therefore be employed, consistently with propriety, nor with even vulgar honesty, to denote the other.

3. The same writer argues this right from the smallness of the objects and accidents by which the life of

man is frequently destroyed without his concurrence. 'A hair,' he says, 'a fly, an insect, is able to destroy this mighty being, whose life is of such importance. Is it an absurdity then,' he asks, 'to suppose, that human prudence may lawfully dispose of what depends on such insignificant causes?'

To this question the reply is easy, and complete.

The destruction of human life by a fly, an insect, or a hair, is accomplished, as every man perfectly well knows, and as every man habitually says, by the immediate providence of God. In the case of suicide, it is destroyed by the will of man himself. God, who gave life, has an unquestionable right to take it away. It is yet to be proved, that man, who has only received it from God, has a right to destroy it without the known permission of its Author.

4. This assertion is, however, *denied* by Mr. Hume; and he directly declares, that *suicide is as absolutely the work of God, as any of those events specified under the preceding head.* 'When I fall upon my own sword,' he says, 'I receive my death equally from the hands of the Deity, as if it had proceeded from a lion, a precipice, or a fever.'

Mr. Hume does not in this Essay any where, in form, discuss the question, 'Whether man is a moral agent, in such a sense as to be accountable for his actions, and to be deserving of praise or blame, punishment or reward.' But it is evident, that he all along proceeds upon the supposition, that man is *not* such an agent. Of this he has given very numerous and very plain indications. A very clear and decisive one is found in the declaration which I am now considering. If man is not such an agent, all the observations in this Essay might have been spared. For plainly no action of man could in this case be of a criminal, because it could not be of a moral, nature. In this case, it would be equally just to censure a post or a wall for falling upon a man, and killing him, as to censure an assassin for producing the same catastrophe by an act of murder

If man be not such an agent, all inquiries concerning the moral nature of his actions are nugatory ; because they are unmeaning. Mr. Hume, particularly, ought never to have written the numerous things which he has so strenuously urged concerning right and wrong, in the different parts of his works. Neither rectitude, nor its opposite, are predicable of *brutes*. Why ? Because they are not moral agents. If *men* are not moral agents ; neither would these attributes be any more predicable of *them*. But if men are moral agents, then those which are called human actions, are not in any such sense the acts of God, as to prevent men from being accountable for them, or to prevent them from being truly commendable and rewardable for one class of such actions, and blameworthy and punishable for the opposite. All nations, in all ages, have accordingly censured and punished such as were guilty of one class of these actions, and praised and rewarded such as performed the other. On this foundation rests all human intercourse, and all human discipline. The child is punished at home and at school, because he is considered as having done that which is wrong ; and rewarded in both, because he is considered as having done that which is right. On the same grounds men are disesteemed, hated, censured, and punished even with death ; or approved, loved, applauded, and have their merit acknowledged by the most ample reward. As this has been the universal conduct of men from the beginning, it is a clear and full testimony of the views entertained by the human mind concerning this subject. It is farther to be observed, that men cannot act in any other manner. The admission of the doctrine, that mankind are not such agents, would ruin the world. Nor ought it to be forgotten, that, although many persons have thought proper to assert this doctrine, not an individual among them has ever been found who acted in conformity to it ; not one, who did not as bitterly complain of what he called wrongs, or vindicate as strenuously what he called his rights, as his fellow

men. But should we admit this argument, it will prove more than either we, or even Mr. Hume, may be aware of; at least, more than he intended. If men are not moral agents, if their voluntary actions are merely the acts of God, then it will follow that, equally with suicide, their frauds, lies, oppressions, and murders, are acts of God. Should a swindler cheat Mr. Hume out of his estate, or an assassin plunge a poniard into his bosom, it would, I think, be a very odd, a very unsatisfactory consolation to him, to be told by the villain, that he ought to be perfectly contented with the villany, since it was only an act of his Creator.

5. Another argument alleged by Mr. Hume for the right in question is, that *suicide does not disturb the order of the universe*. 'There is no being,' he says, 'which by ever so irregular an action can encroach upon the plan of the Creator's providence, or disorder the universe.'

If Mr. Hume intended by this declaration, that God rules all things with such a universal and absolute dominion, as that 'none can stay his hand,' nor any being lawfully 'say unto him, What dost thou?'—as that he will bring 'good out of the evil, and order out of the confusion,' occasioned by sin—he has undoubtedly declared here a truth of high importance. Unfortunately for him, however, this truth will contribute nothing to the support of his cause. No being can indeed resist the hand of God: but every sinner wishes to resist it; and in this wish becomes guilty, hateful, and deserving of punishment.

In this declaration, and many others contained in the same treatise, the author studiously avoids mentioning, what he ought every where to have strongly insisted on, *the broad and obvious distinction between the providential and the preceptive will of God*. It is unquestionably a part of the *providential* will of God, to permit (for reasons inscrutable by us, at least in most instances, but undoubtedly sufficient in themselves) the existence of sinful actions; but it is no part of his *preceptive* will, either to require or to

allow them. His preceptive will, or, in other words, the moral law, requires of all intelligent beings perfect holiness; a disposition perfectly loving what he loves, and hating what he hates. So evident is this truth, that all nations, not absolutely sunk in ignorance, have discerned it to a considerable extent by the mere light of nature. The savages of the western wilderness have acknowledged, equally with the Greeks and Romans, that reverence and gratitude were due to their gods, and that *they* required of men justice, truth, and kindness to their fellow-men. Mr. Hume himself would not dare to say, that God does not love these things; nor that he does not require them of his creatures, any more than he loves and requires impiety, ingratitude, injustice, falsehood, and cruelty. He would not say, that God at all loves or requires the things last mentioned. Loose as his apprehensions concerning religion or morality were, he would not say, that God does not hate the crimes which I have specified; nor that he has not forbidden them to mankind. He would not say, that these crimes are equally agreeable to the will of God, equally pleasing to him, as actions of his intelligent creatures, with the virtues mentioned above. But all this he must say, in order to make this allegation an argument to his purpose.

If no action of any being can be so irregular as to be opposed to the preceptive will of God; then it will follow, that impiety, ingratitude, profaneness, atheism, fraud, lying, oppression, injustice, adultery, rape, and murder, are equally agreeable to the Creator with piety, justice, truth, benevolence, purity and mercy. Then it will follow also, that God is wholly indifferent to all these objects; and that all which is meant by right and wrong, holds exactly the same place in his estimation and pleasure. In other words, it will follow, that the Creator of the universe is wholly regardless of the moral character and conduct of his creatures.

6. Mr. Hume insists, that *suicide does no harm to society*; or, at the least, that, as by cutting off his

life in this manner *he only ceases to do good, he does the least supposable harm to society.*

To this I answer, that if he has *friends*, he compels them to lament his death, with views peculiarly distressing by their perplexity, and with feelings of agony and despair. Perhaps no object, unless the person who is cut off in the unrepented guilt of murdering another, is regarded with more painful emotions, than a beloved friend, who has voluntarily terminated his own life. The minds of those whom he leaves behind him sink under the remembrance of what he has done in this world, and tremble to follow him to another. Keen indeed must be the edge of that distress which finds its only consolation, and its only hope, in the doubting belief, perhaps in the faint conjecture, that the friend whom it deplores was hurried out of life by the impulse of delirium.

If the suicide had a *family*, he has robbed them of all that advice, consolation, sympathy, and those kind offices universally, which he owed to *them* in a peculiar manner. All these he has vowed to his *wife*. God has made it his duty to render them to his *children*. To both also he is bound by the same obligations to furnish support. This, perhaps, he *may* have provided. If he has, he has still robbed his children of that parental instruction, government, habituation, and example, which together constitute in most cases far the most arduous, the most important, and the most useful labour of man, and the chief duty which, ordinarily, he has it in his power ever to perform.

Society at large he robs of one of its members, and of all the duties which that member owed to society.

At the same time he has presented to all these an example, which, if followed by them, would destroy at once the family, the community, and the world. Yet, if he has acted right, it would be equally right for them to follow him. No rule can be formed concerning this subject, but a universal one. Mr. Hume has made it such. If his rule be right, then, by merely adhering to rectitude, the present inhabi-

tants of the world may exterminate the race of man in a moment. But,

7. Mr. Hume, supposing that men would not make use of this right, unless in circumstances of distress, considers this, at least, as a justifying cause for suicide.

‘Most people,’ he says, ‘who lie under any temptation to abandon existence, are in some such situation; that is, in age, or under infirmities: incapable of promoting the interest of society, a burden to it, or afflicted in some manner or other.’

On this subject I observe,

(1.) *That this situation, whatever it may be, is one in which God by his providence has placed the man. It is therefore a situation of which we cannot reasonably or lawfully complain, unless we can lawfully and reasonably complain of the dispensations of God.*

(2.) *It is a situation in which, if we perform our duty, we may glorify our Maker, by voluntarily fulfilling such designs as infinite wisdom and goodness has thought proper to accomplish by our instrumentality, and has put it into our power to accomplish. It may be said, that, should we put an end to our lives, God will still be glorified. I grant it. But we shall not be voluntary instruments of his glory. This is our duty, and our only duty. If this then be not done, our whole duty is left undone. If we refuse to do this duty, we refuse to obey the will of our Maker, rebel against his government, and voluntarily oppose his designs. This is sin, and the only sin. What the duties are, to which we are called in cases of affliction, common sense, even without the aid of revelation, might, one would think, determine with no great difficulty. They are obviously the duties of submission, dependance, patience, and fortitude, prayer for our support and deliverance; and such efforts for this end as are consistent with the spirit here specified. By this character God is as really and certainly glorified, as by any other which man can exhibit. It scarcely needs the aid of revelation to discern, that submission to God must be an acceptable offering to him. But if we put an end to*

our lives because we are afflicted, we declare, in the decisive language of action, that we will not, or cannot, bear what God has been pleased to lay upon us. In the former case, we declare that we will not submit to his dispensations; in the latter, we moreover declare, that the burdens which he lays upon us are such as we cannot, and therefore such as we ought not, to endure: of course, that they are oppressive, and unjust.

(3.) *The case is falsely stated by Mr. Hume.*

There is no situation which is intolerable, except those by which life is brought to an end without our intervention; and these are incapable of being referred to the case in hand. In every other case, we can sustain our afflictions, if we please. That it is our duty to sustain them, and to sustain them willingly, cannot be denied, unless by him who also denies, that it is our duty to obey God in any case.

(4.) *The position of Mr. Hume, that we are useless to society, in any situation in which we can become guilty of suicide, is also false.*

It will be remembered, that I all along except cases of melancholy and delirium. It is however true, that even in these cases no man can know that he will not, at some future time, be useful to his fellow-men. In every other case, a man, possessed of the power of contriving and executing his own destruction, may be, and can know that he may be, useful to the world. I can think of no case more favourable to the position of Mr. Hume, than that of a person confined for a long period to his bed; or, as it is commonly termed *bed-ridden*. A man, even in this situation, may, if he pleases, be extensively useful. The patience, fortitude, and piety, with which he may sustain this trying affliction, may be among the most edifying and persuasive proofs of the reality, power, and excellence of the religion which he professes, and the efficacious means of conversion and salvation to multitudes. Mr. Hume himself says, that 'the damnation of one man is an infinitely greater evil, than the subversion of a thousand mil-

lions of kingdoms.' This evil the man who is bed-ridden may prevent with regard to himself, and with regard to others; and may also be the means of accomplishing the contrary inestimable good. It cannot be said, that such a man is useless. At the same time, it is a false supposition, that a man can be useless who acts as he ought; or, in other words, does his duty in any situation in which God is pleased to place him. God does nothing in vain. Still less can it be supposed that he places an intelligent being in any situation in which his obedience to the divine will must be useless.

(5.) *Neither is it true that any man is necessarily a burden to society.*

A vicious man is, I acknowledge, often such a burden. But he is not necessarily vicious. His sloth, prodigality, insincerity, profaneness, falsehood, fraud, cruelty, or whatever vice he may be guilty of, is wholly the result of his own choice. The moment he renounces these evils he will become, not a burden, but a blessing.

A virtuous man may become unable to support himself, may be incurably sick, or hopelessly bereft of his most useful faculties, and in either of these situations may be esteemed a burden to society by the lazy, the covetous, and the unfeeling. But he will be esteemed such by no virtuous man. He who remembers, that ministrations of kindness to the 'least of Christ's brethren' will be accepted as offerings to himself, will never, unless in some unhappy moment of sloth, or worldliness, think the performance of it burdensome. Christ has informed his disciples, that 'the poor they will always have with them.' On his part the legacy was not unkind; to us it is obviously a blessing. Nothing more enlarges the heart, refines the affections, or improves the character, than kindness freely rendered to the afflicted. Nothing more excites a spirit of dependance on God, or awakens gratitude for his blessings to us, or expands the feelings of benevolent sympathy, or endears to us our fellow-men, particularly our fellow-Christians

or assimilates our disposition to that of the Redeemer. He to whom, without any fault of his own, mankind are indebted for these benefits, cannot be a burden to society.

I have now reviewed every argument of Mr. Hume which, in my opinion, merits an answer ; and his arguments, so far as I know, are all of any importance which have been hitherto alleged in favour of suicide. I shall only add one observation to those which I have already made under this head. It is this : *All the distresses almost which give birth to this wanton destruction of human life are the mere effects of predominant wickedness in the mind of the suicide.* Losses at the gaming-table, disappointments of ambition, mortified avarice, wounded pride, and frustrated hopes of sensuality, are usually the immediate sources of this crime. Instead of killing himself for such reasons as these, the true interest of the unhappy man demands of him, with infinite force, that he should live, repent, and reform.

II. *I shall now allege several proofs of the criminality of suicide, in addition to those which have been unavoidably specified in answering the arguments of Mr. Hume.*

Of these, the first which I shall mention is the text.

In the first Discourse from this passage it was observed, that the command which it contains is expressed in the most absolute manner, ‘*Thou shalt not kill ;*’ that to kill is the thing forbidden, and by the words is forbidden, in all cases whatever ; that the words were chosen by God himself, and bind us therefore with infinite authority ; and that man cannot lawfully originate an exception, nor in any other manner limit their import. These observations, it is presumed, cannot be denied to be true. But if they are true, the text forbids suicide in the most absolute manner.

Mr. Hume indeed observes, *that the law of Moses is abolished, except so far as it is established by the law of nature.* A Christian will probably be satisfied of the authority of the decalogue, without this condition when he finds it expressly established by Christ.

2 In addition to this *decisive proof*, a proof so decisive, as to need no addition, I observe, that *the suicide hurries himself to the judgment in the commission of a gross crime, of which he cannot repent.* If we should even allow, that the criminality of this act was not capable of being proved, so far as the act itself only is concerned, it cannot be denied, that *he who commits it, is in some degree, at least, uncertain whether it be lawful, or not.* To abstain from it, he at the same time knows to be lawful. In this case, to commit suicide is a gross sin ; because the perpetrator refuses to do that which he knows to be right, and does that, of whose rectitude he has no assurance.

Farther : *No person who thus puts an end to his life is assured that his salvation, independently of this act, is secured.* Of course, even on the most favourable supposition, he puts his eternity at hazard, and ventures, in an inexcusable and dreadful manner upon perdition.

Finally : *There are, to say the least, strong, and hitherto unanswered, reasons to prove suicide a crime ; and that of enormous magnitude.*

These reasons will never be answered. It will always be true, that there are important ends to be accomplished by every man during the whole period through which his life would extend, did he not lay violent hands on himself. These ends are constituted, and set before him by God himself. In refusing to accomplish them, the suicide violates the highest obligations under which he is or can be placed. He is, according to the supposition, in affliction. This affliction both reason and revelation declare to be sent by his Creator. It is sent for the very purpose of amending his character, awakening in him patience and submission, faith and fortitude, enabling him to feel his dependance, softening his heart with tenderness towards his fellow creatures, exciting in him a spirit of universal obedience, and thus preparing him for endless life. I need not say that these designs, on the part of God, are pre-eminently benevolent ; nor that in refusing to accomplish

them, nor that 'in sinning against God in this manner, he supremely 'wrongs his own soul.'

Human life is plainly intended by the Creator to be a mere course of duty and obedience. This is the direct appointment of the Creator. To wish to frustrate or reverse this appointment, much more to attempt the frustration or reversion of it by overt acts, is sinful of course. How sinful then must be his violent attempt to oppose the divine will!

But the suicide cuts himself off from every opportunity, from the very possibility, of repenting of these multiplied crimes. Hurried into eternity by his own hand, he appears before the bar of God, with all his guilt upon his head. Should it be said, that he may secure himself an opportunity of repentance by a gradual death; I answer, that neither the temper of mind with which he destroys his life, nor the views which God cannot but entertain of this violent act of rebellion, furnish him with any hope that he will become penitent.

3. *The Scriptures expressly forbid us voluntarily to sink under any affliction.*

'My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither faint when thou art rebuked of him.'—Christ has said to all his disciples, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation:' but he has most benevolently subjoined, 'in me ye shall have peace:' that is, peace, awakened in the midst of your afflictions, or flowing from them, as a regular consequence of your submission and sanctification. Accordingly St. Paul declares, that, 'although no affliction is for the present joyous, but all are grievous: yet nevertheless they afterward yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.'

In these passages we are required, unconditionally, to sustain our afflictions with submission, patience, and fortitude. This command we cannot disobey, even in thought, without sin; much less in so violent an act of opposition. Suicide is the result, not only of a total want of submission, but of direct and violent hostility against the will of God

It is a declaration, that we will not 'endure the chastening of God;' and that the afflictions with which he is pleased to visit us are intolerable; and that they are therefore unreasonable and unrighteous specimens of oppression in his administrations. No charge can be more obviously blasphemous than this; more unsuited to the character of the Creator, or more unbecoming the mouth of a creature.

4. *The suicide is always bound to prolong his life, by personal duties, which are indispensable.*

He is bound to secure his own salvation. He is bound to provide for his family. If he performs not these so long as they need them, and so long as it is in his power, 'he denies the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' He is bound to train up his children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' He is bound to promote the happiness and salvation of those around him; and, generally, of his fellow-men. Universally, whatever is his situation, he may, if he lives, do good to himself, and to mankind; and this good he is bound to do, so long as God is pleased to spare his life. When he destroys himself, he is guilty of gross rebellion against God in refusing to perform these duties.

5. *The Scriptures never exhibit suicide as the conduct of any but very wicked men.*

Job, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel and his three companions, Christ and the apostles, underwent afflictions incomparably more severe than those for which the suicide destroys his life. Yet neither of these thought it proper voluntarily to terminate his own life. Daniel and his companions, Christ and his apostles, were in most instances, however, destined to a violent and scandalous death; one of the very cases which Mr. Hume has selected to shew the lawfulness of suicide. This they perfectly well knew; but not one of them appears to have thought of preventing the pain and disgrace by laying violent hands on himself. This case is plainly an extreme one. None can be more so. Yet the perfect piety of Christ, and the exemplary piety of these

virtuous men, instead of dictating this desperate course of conduct to *them*, taught them, severally, to wait with humble resignation for the will of God, and patiently to receive their destiny from his hand. The example of these persons will be followed by every virtuous man.

Saul, an open rebel against his Maker, and the intentional murderer of David and Jonathan; Abithophel, a traitor to his lawful sovereign; and Judas, a traitor to his Redeemer—were suicides. This conduct in them was the result of their dispositions, the product of such principles as controlled these abandoned men. It is therefore rationally argued, that suicide, in the view of the Divine mind, is the moral consequence of the worst principles only. On the contrary, it is equally clear, that virtue in the evangelical sense is totally incompatible with the perpetration of this act, and absolutely forbids the voluntary destruction of our own lives. He who meditates the voluntary termination of his own life, ought solemnly to remember, that he is indulging a spirit which is directly opposed to that of Christ, and strongly assimilated to that of Saul, Abithophel, and Judas.

SERMON CXVIII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT.

DRUNKENNESS.

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.—EPH
v. 18.

In the preceding Discourses I have considered several methods in which life is destroyed, in opposition to the sixth command of the decalogue. In this Discourse I shall make some observations con-

cerning another of these methods ; viz. *Drunkenness*.

Drunkenness is nearly allied to suicide. It is an equally certain means of shortening life. The principal difference, so far as the termination of life is concerned, lies in the mode. What is appropriately called suicide, is a *sudden* or *immediate* termination of life. Drunkenness brings it *gradually* to an end. The destruction in both cases is equally certain, and not materially different in the degree of turpitude. In many instances, indeed, this catastrophe is brought to pass at least as suddenly by drunkenness as by suicide. There is also another difference between these crimes. The suicide intends directly to destroy his life, and makes this his prime purpose ; the drunkard thinks of nothing less : the prime object in his view is the gratification of his relish for strong drink, united with that bewildered elevation of spirits, which he feels in the hour of intoxication.

In the text we are expressly and universally forbidden to commit this sin. The penalty incurred by the commission is as expressly declared in 1 Cor vi. 10 ; where it is said, that ‘ Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.’ This threatening we are not indeed to consider as absolute, any more than others expressed in a similar manner. Undoubtedly, no person who enters eternity in the character of a drunkard will ‘ inherit the kingdom of God.’ But I know of no reason to conclude, that he who, though once a drunkard, has become a penitent, will not be accepted.

This interesting subject I design to consider at large under the following heads :—

- I. *The nature,*
- II. *The causes,*
- III. *The evils of drunkenness, and,*
- IV. *The means of avoiding it.*

I. I shall make a few observations concerning the *nature* of this sin.

Drunkenness is that singular state of man in which he loses, either partially or wholly, the use of his bodily and mental powers, under the operation

of spirituous drink, opium, or other means of intoxication.

Drunkenness is either *occasional* or *habitual*.

Occasional drunkenness exists only in irregular, separate, solitary, or even single instances; and is produced sometimes by design, and sometimes by accident.

Habitual drunkenness is a frequent, and usually a regular intoxication; occasioned by that increased and peculiar love of strong drink, which is generated by occasional drunkenness.

Habitual drunkenness will be the principal subject of this Discourse. It will only be necessary to remark concerning *occasional drunkenness*, that all the observations almost concerning *habitual drunkenness* will be applicable to it, although in an inferior degree; and that, wherever the subject shall appear to demand any serious discrimination, I shall endeavour to make them in the progress of the discussion.

II. *The causes of this sin* (by which I intend, not the immediate, and properly efficient causes, such as those already mentioned; but those which, although more remote, are yet deeply concerned in the production of it) are principally the following:—

1. *Example.*

By this I intend, that we gradually acquire a habit of drunkenness, by seeing others drink; and, if I may be allowed the expression, catching the practice merely from the fact, that we often witness it in others. Wherever the character of those who set the example is the object of particular affection, esteem, or reverence, the influence of the example becomes proportionally great and dangerous. Parents in this manner become peculiarly, and other relations and friends generally, powerful means of seduction and ruin to their children, and other relatives. In this case I suppose nothing but the example, and the veneration and endearment by which it is accompanied, to produce the corruption of those to whom it is exhibited.

2. *Frequenting those places where strong drink is conveniently obtained.*

A tavern, especially a vulgar one, or a dram-shop, or an ale-house, newly opened, usually exhibits strongly, as well as clearly, the efficacy of this cause. Each of them soon begins to attract its train of drinking customers; and within a moderate period becomes surrounded by its circle of drunkards. There is scarcely a greater nuisance to society than houses of this nature; in which spirituous liquors are sold in small quantities to the neighbouring inhabitants. Millions of the human race have in these baleful haunts taken the first fatal step towards perdition.

3. *Evil companions.*

These usually combine all the efficacy of the former causes, with many additional temptations. They present the example, they provide the retreat, and the convenience. At the same time, they add to these the force of direct and powerful solicitations, the sprightliness of wit, the gaiety of sports and songs, the pungency of ridicule, the influence of good nature and affection; and the power of that sympathy which is always found in social festivity. Such a combination is too powerful to be resisted by common minds; perhaps by any mind which is voluntarily, for any length of time, within its reach. He who frequents the society of jovial companions in an habitual manner, may fairly consider himself as destined in the end to become a sot.

4. *Customary and regular drinking.*

Multitudes of persons accustom themselves to take a moderate quantity of strong drink, day by day, at regular periods; in the morning, immediately before dinner, or in the evening. Labouring men in this country are, to a great extent, accustomed to use ardent spirits at certain given times of the day; considering them as necessary to recruit their strength, which is supposed to be wasted by their toil. Some of them, less attentive to particular times of drinking, demand stated quantities of strong

drink, which they regard as indispensable to enable them to pursue their daily labour. Men of wealth and fashion, with nearly the same regularity, consume large quantities of wine at and after dinner. In these, and in all other, cases of regular drinking, an habitual attachment to strong drink is insensibly begun, strengthened, and confirmed. The man who drinks spirits regularly, ought to consider himself as having already entered the path of habitual intoxication.

5. *Affliction also is, not unfrequently, a cause of drunkenness.*

The affliction here referred to is both bodily and mental. Certain diseases of the body, it is well known, bring with them lowness of spirits, discouragement, and melancholy. The patient oftentimes resorts to the use of strong drink, as a remedy for these evils, and finds in it a temporary relief from the pressure. Oftentimes the physician prescribes this remedy in form, and thus adds the sanction of his skill and character to the patient's inclination. In every case of this nature a degree of pain is usually experienced in that part of the stomach which is sometimes called the *second sensory*. This is commonly relieved, at least in some degree, by the use of strong drink, taken at first in moderate quantities. The remedy, however, leaves the disease worse than it found it. To produce the desired effect a greater quantity is soon necessary, and then a greater still. In this manner multitudes of persons become drunkards.

The mental evils which give birth to this unhappy habit are numerous. Most or all of them, however, are such as, instead of exciting, waste or destroy the energy of the mind. Of this nature are a strong sense of irretrievable disgrace, a painful consciousness of perplexed or desperate circumstances, merited loss of esteem and affection, highly valued by ourselves, long-continued suspense concerning some important interest, final discouragement of ardent wishes or favourite pursuits, together with several

other very anxious and hopeless situations of the mind. From the distress suffered in these and the like cases, it often betakes itself for relief to spirituous liquors. The relief is necessarily transient; and, in order to be enjoyed to any great extent, must therefore be often repeated. By this repetition the sufferer soon becomes of course habitually intemperate.

6. *A small number of persons find a cause of drunkenness in an original, native appetite for strong drink.*

The number of these is so small, and the cause itself so little needs explanation, that it is unnecessary to dwell on this part of the subject.

III. *The principal evils of drunkenness are the following:—*

1. *It exhibits the subject of it in the light of extreme odiousness and degradation.*

Drunkenness always deprives a man, either partially or wholly, of his reason, and very often of his bodily faculties. A man without reason is either a maniac, or a brute; and, for the time, presents the eye with a spectacle more sunk than the brute, and more painful than the maniac. The loss of reason is to man the loss of all which renders him either comfortable, respectable, or useful. How painful, how humiliating is the sight of an idiot! How excruciating the appearance of a lunatic! How lowering to human pride and independence, to sober contemplation and real dignity, a respectable man, transformed by age or sickness into a driveller! Such a transformation the drunkard accomplishes for himself, during every period of his intoxication; and adds to all the other circumstances of degradation, the peculiarly humbling and hateful one, that he has voluntarily degraded himself.

In this situation the drunkard becomes, in the literal and most emphatical sense, a fool. His conversation is that of a tongue, vibrating without a mind; moving, because it has been accustomed to move; lisping and babbling an imperfect, cluttered, and dragging articulation; a kind of instinctive ef-

fort, resembling that of the idiot, who, having learned to count the strokes of a clock, continued to count after the clock had ceased to go.

In the mean time, many drunkards, who partially lose their reason, set their passions on fire. All restraints in this case vanish with their reason. The mind becomes a furnace of frenzy; and the bodily powers, stimulated to more than ordinary vigour, are employed only as the instruments of rage and violence. In the former case, the man sunk down to the level of a *swine*. In this, he converts himself into a *tiger*. In the former case, he became loathsome and despicable. In this, he becomes equally the object of hatred and terror.

There is, however, a stage in the progress of both, at which they lose alike, and absolutely, the powers of both body and mind. Each then becomes absolutely stupid; a mass of flesh, in which a soul once lived, thought, animated, and controlled; but from which it has fled, indignant at the brutal abuse which it has suffered. It has become palsied, lifeless, and, for the period, extinct, under a shock which it was unable to sustain.

2. *Drunkenness exposes the subject of it to many, and those often extreme, dangers.*

The drunkard is always exposed to be overreached and defrauded during the seasons of his partial insanity. At these seasons, many persons, devoted to the use of strong drink, are peculiarly inclined to manage business, and make bargains. The weakness, the want of self-control, and the incapacity of forming just estimates of men and things, always visible at these seasons in such men, mark them out as prey for the cheat and the sharper. Accordingly they often take such measures to produce in them such a degree of intoxication, as they well know will effectually answer their own purposes. Without any such pre-concertion, there are however always sharpers enough, ready to arrest the drunkard in his intoxication, and drunkards enough to furnish them with victims. At almost all such periods the losses

incurred are material, frequently they are great, and sometimes they are fatal.

At other seasons, when the intoxication is complete, the subject of it is exposed to extreme personal dangers. Few men in this situation are aware, so long as they retain a partial use of their limbs, and some faint glimmerings of understanding, how incompetent they have become to direct their own conduct with safety. Of course, they venture without apprehension into such situations as demand the full exercise of their bodily and mental powers. Hence one of them has fallen from his horse, and broken his limbs or his neck. Another has fallen into the fire, and either terminated his life, or made himself through the remainder of it a miserable cripple. A third has lost himself in a wintry storm, and perished, because he could not find the way to his own house. A fourth has fallen overboard, and been drowned. A fifth has killed himself by swallowing a larger quantity of ardent spirits than he was aware, or than his nature could sustain. By these and many other accidents, to some or other of which the drunkard is almost always exposed, multitudes have come to an untimely end.

Nor is the danger much less to the intoxicated person of doing, without any design, and even in contradiction to his prevailing wishes, serious injuries to those around him. Not a small number of dwelling-houses have been consumed by these undesigning incendiaries. In the conflagration, the inhabitants, whoever they may have been, most frequently his family, and perhaps as frequently the drunkard himself, have perished. Who, that has the least share of sober reflection or common sense left, would not tremble at the first approach towards this terrible catastrophe?

3. *The drunkard exposes himself to many temptations, and many sins.*

Of this nature indeed are all those things which have been mentioned under the preceding heads. But, beside these evils, the use of spirituous liquors

produces many others. It excites to a high degree of intenseness most of the vehement passions of man, particularly anger and lust. As the government of reason is lost, and the power of conscience laid asleep, the passions, at all times sufficiently strong, assume, with increased strength, the absolute control of the man, and spur and goad him on to every crime within his reach. In this situation, it is to be remembered, he is rarely alone. Other drunkards are usually around him, whose reason is equally enfeebled, and whose passions are equally awake. Among men of strong passions, and little reason, disputes cannot fail to arise. In such men disputes generate anger of course. Anger here regularly issues in quarrelling; and quarrelling terminates in maimed limbs, bloodshed, and death. A large part of the murders which have existed in this world have grown out of intoxication.

5. *A drunkard necessarily wastes his own property.*

This he often does, as I have already observed, by the foolish and mischievous bargains which he makes during the hours of intoxication. But this is far from being all. In the mere purchase of strong drink he expends greater sums than any man, without an arithmetical calculation, would suspect, and obviously greater than moderate property can bear.

Nor is this all. A great part of his time is spent in preparing the means of intoxication, in the haunts to which he resorts for it, among his drinking companions, and in sleeping and wearing off its immediate effects. All this time would otherwise have been employed in useful business, and would have thus been the means of increasing, instead of diminishing, his property.

Nor is he less a sufferer by that gradual diminution of bodily and mental powers mentioned above. His frame and limbs are of course diseased. In this manner he becomes, at times, disabled from pursuing his business at all; and, at other times, obliged to pursue it to very little purpose. What he does in this situation is but half done; and would often have

been as well or much better omitted. His judgment also and skill are equally impaired; and, instead of directing his business with success, are wasted on feeble, fruitless plans, miserably executed. As these powers decay, he becomes careless, listless, and negligent of his concerns; and sees them continually declining, and himself daily approaching towards beggary, without either the power or the will to stay the deplorable progress.

Thus he voluntarily robs himself of a comfortable support in old age, and in the sickness to which he is so eminently exposed; and, at an untimely period withers the power and wastes the means of enjoyment.

5. The drunkard destroys his health.

No constitution is able to resist the scorching efficacy of that liquid fire, which this slave of sense and sin incessantly swallows. Pain, sorrow, and disease are its inevitable effects. The stomach becomes speedily too much weakened to receive, and the appetite to relish food, until both have been stimulated by a new draught. Speedily, the limbs complain and decay, the senses become obtuse, and all the energy of the body gradually wastes away.

In this situation also the skill of the physician and the power of medicine are rendered useless. A large proportion of all the useful medicines, those particularly which the diseases of drinking men chiefly demand, are stimulants. But these men have used one of the most powerful of all stimulants so often, and so long, that medicines of this nature cease to operate upon their constitutions with their proper sanative power. They are left therefore in a peculiar degree to the ravages and sufferings of disease, without the usual means of cure, alleviation, or hope.

6. The drunkard wastes his reputation.

‘A good name is better than great riches.’ It would be no small consolation therefore to a man of this description, under the loss of his property and his health, if he could at the same time preserve his character. But, unhappily for him, his reputation is squandered faster than his property, and destroyed

more suddenly than his health. Drunkenness is sin which, after it has once become habitual, is so rarely relinquished, as hardly to admit the feeblest hope of reformation. In a very early part of his progress, therefore, he becomes branded with the full and entire character of a *drunkard*. His reputation, of course, is lost at an untimely period; and his infamy is of a premature growth. But what character can be more degrading, more indicative of the loss of virtue and common sense, and of the voluntary assumption of folly and self-pollution? What name is more scandalous; more evidential, that a man has left his proper rank in the creation and sunk himself down to the level of brutes, than that of a *sot*? But on this reputation, thus wantonly and profligately wasted, hangs almost all the comfort and usefulness of men. To preserve it fresh and untainted, therefore, is alike their interest and their duty; a duty indispensable, an interest which cannot be estimated. He who does not highly value it is a fool; he who wantonly throws it away is a madman!

7. *The drunkard destroys his reason.*

Reason has been often, and justly, styled 'the light of the mind.' Mr. Locke, with great force and beauty, styles it 'the candle of the Lord, shining within man.' It is our only ultimate directress. Even the doctrines and precepts of revelation can be nothing to us, until reason has first discerned it to be a revelation, and determined the real import of its precepts and doctrines. Still more absolutely is it the arbiter of all our ordinary concerns. For these we have no other guide, and can submit them to no other control. In a word, reason makes us men; and without it we should be brutes.

But this invaluable possession, this essence of his character as a human being, himself, his all, the drunkard rapidly wastes away.

8. *The drunkard destroys his usefulness.*

This evil is dreadfully involved in the loss of his property health reputation and reason. The per-

petual degradation with which he daily appears to the eyes of those around him, not only forbids the esteem and confidence which are indispensable to the attainment of useful business, but renders him an object of abhorrence and loathing. Thus, without reputation to recommend him to others, or property, or even inclination to befriend them; with health and reason so decayed, as to be unable to befriend himself; he ceases to be of any serious use to either. Of course, he becomes a burden, a nuisance, a calamity to the world. 'Good would it have been for this man, if he had never been born.'

In the mean time, sunk and lost as he is, he continues, and usually for a length of time, to be a merry and jovial haunter of taverns and dram-shops; and, like a vessel of variolous matter occasionally opened, spreads, from day to day, a pestilential contagion through the clusters of miserable wretches who frequent these dangerous resorts. Few men injure a community more dreadfully than a drunkard. The sin which peculiarly constitutes his character is almost wholly derived from example. Every such example, therefore, is the real cause of extending the evil to succeeding generations, as well as of corrupting his contemporaries. Were the injurers of mankind to receive their real deserts, Newgate would exchange many of its present tenants for the mischievous slaves of strong drink.

9. *The drunkard ruins his family.*

In this comprehensive and affecting article, several particulars merit the most serious consideration.

(1.) *He spreads through his family the habit of intoxication.*

The influence of parental example, especially when an evil example, I have already had occasion particularly to unfold. In the present melancholy case, all the power of such an example is felt to the utmost. It is an example seen daily, in the house, and in the parent. It is seen by children so soon as they can see any thing, and long before their minds

are capable of distinguishing its nature or its tendency. The parent visibly regards spirituous liquors as a peculiarly interesting enjoyment of sense, at a time when they know no enjoyments but those of sense; of course, they cannot but think it eminently valuable. The means of intoxication are also provided to their hand; and their own home, so far as a dangerous and malignant influence is concerned, is changed into a dram-shop. The mother, in the mean time, not unfrequently contracts the same evil habit from the father; and thus both parents unite in the unnatural and monstrous employment of corrupting their children. What a prospect is here presented to our view! A husband and wife, to whom God has given children, to be trained up by them for heaven, united together in taking them by the hand, and leading them coolly to perdition! What heart, not made of stone, can look at such a family, without feeling exquisite distress, and the most terrible forebodings? Contemplate, for a moment, the innocent, helpless beings, perfectly unconscious of their danger, and incapable of learning it, thus led as victims to the altar of a modern Moloch, less sanguinary indeed, but not less cruel, than the heathen god, before whom the Israelitish parents burnt their own offspring; and say, whether you most pity the children, or detest the parents.

(2.) *By squandering his property he deprives them of both comfort and respectability.*

The comfort which we enjoy in the present world, so far as the world itself is concerned, is principally found in realizing the expectations which we have rationally and habitually formed concerning our future circumstances in life. These expectations are, of course, grounded on the circumstances of our parents. We expect what we are thus taught to expect; and this naturally is, that we receive such an education, and pass through life in such a manner, as is common to the children of those who are in similar circumstances. These expectations the drunken parent gradually fritters away with the gradual di-

minution of his estate. The mind of the child sees, with more and more discouragement, one expected gratification vanish after another, till it ceases to expect at all; and sinks down into sullen or broken-hearted despair.

Among the evils which children suffer, a prime one is *the loss of education*; of that education, I mean, which is suited to their condition in life. The instructions which children receive are a debt which no parent can, without extreme guilt, refuse to discharge; and of which no child can be prevented, but by robbery, as well as fraud. They are the chief means of his future comfort and his future usefulness. They take him out of the list of savages, and place him in the rank of men. They form him to wisdom, to worth, and to honour. Beyond this, they open to him the gates of virtue, glory, and immortality, and point to him the path to heaven.

The most important of these instructions the parent himself is able, and therefore bound, to give; the instructions especially of a moral and religious nature, which are given and received with incomparably the greatest efficacy in the morning of life. But what instructions can a drunkard communicate? What must be the efficacy, even of truth itself, proceeding from disturbed reason, a reeling frame, and a babbling tongue? With this image before him, what child can sufficiently withdraw himself from shame and anguish to learn at all? With what a contradictory and monstrous deformity of character must religious truths and precepts be inculcated on his child, by a man imbruted by strong drink!

The government of children is obviously of no less importance than their instruction. But what must be the government exercised by a sot? A mixture of contradictions, imbecility, and rage; a mixture which every child six years old perfectly understands, and which no child of that age can respect or love. How can he reprove them for their faults? His own life is nothing but a *issue* of faults. How

can he enjoin upon them virtuous conduct? His own life is a perpetual war upon virtue. How can he recommend to them religion? His whole character is an insult upon religion. All this his children perfectly know; and their meaning eyes, if he will look into them, will tell him the story in language unutterable.

(3.) *He breaks their hearts by subjecting them to insupportable mortification.*

The drunkard presents his family with the melancholy sight of an intoxicated parent; an image always before their eyes; an image which sinks them in the dust; an image which overwhelms them in despair. What child can look at such an object, and remember that this object is his parent, without a broken heart?

The distresses thus experienced he renders double-edged by his own fretful and passionate temper. All drunkards almost assume this temper of course; and in this manner become intolerable nuisances to those with whom they are most intimately connected. The house of a drunkard is always the seat of discontent and turmoil. The sufferings of his family soon become too great to be borne with patience. Complaints, which nature cannot stifle, beget criminations, reproaches, abuses, and quarrels; terminating not unfrequently in wounds, bloodshed, and death.

In this manner the *temper* of his family is ruined. They are taught, and in a sense forced, to become hostile to each other; and prepared to become enemies to mankind. At the same time, they are rendered uncomfortable to themselves; and, should they have families of their own, are made curses to them also.

Their spirits in the mean time, are broken down by an unceasing consciousness which they cannot escape, that their disgrace, in all its complication, is known and published wherever *they* are known. The *head*, at least, of their domestic body is not only ~~unpleasantly~~ *disagreeably*, but scandalously sick; and sick with a

hopeless, as well as shameful disease. The *members* in greater or less degrees, suffer with the head, and for it, at least, suffer inexpressibly.

To all these things ought to be added their continual apprehension, that their husband and parent will come to some dreadful disaster, or to an untimely end, by some one of that numerous train of accidents to which he is daily exposed; and the terrible conviction that, should he even escape these evils, he is still going regular onward to final perdition. This consummation of evils they are compelled to expect, with an assurance little short of absolute knowledge; and cannot fail to tremble in the morning, lest the dreadful event should arrive before the close of the day.

10. *The drunkard destroys his life.*

The drunkard is as really a suicide, as if he compassed his death by the pistol or the halter. The difference is, principally, that the destruction is *slower*, and accomplished by a long succession of sins, and not by one bold and desperate effort of turpitude; and that the drunkard, instead of aiming at his life, aims merely at the gratification of his appetite; while the suicide makes his own destruction his prime purpose. The drunkard is a negligent, the suicide an intentional, self-murderer. Often, indeed, the drunkard destroys himself in a moment. Often, as I have already observed, he falls from his horse, or into the fire, or into the water, or is brought to an untimely end by some fatal accident. Most usually, however, he wastes gradually the taper of life before the time; and thus cuts off one fourth, one third, or one half of his 'accepted time;' even while he lives, by his desperate progress in sin he terminates all his hopes of salvation.

11. *The drunkard ruins his soul.*

It has been heretofore observed, that the drunkard destroys his reason. In this manner he is unfitted for all profitable use of the means of grace, and for all attention to eternal life. Every call of mercy finds him stupid and regardless. To every threaten-

ing his ears are deaf; to every promise his heart is insensible. The power of motives he knows not how to feel; and even their nature he cannot comprehend. To temptations, on the contrary, he is always exposed, alive, and awake. Around him therefore temptations throng, and every tempter fastens on him as his prey. Sin, of course, becomes his business; and 'he draws iniquity as with a cart rope.'

In the mean time he is, beyond most other men, hopeless of reformation. The hopeless condition of a sot is proverbial. Amendment in this case is so rare, as scarcely to admit belief. Indeed, heaven seems to have stamped this sin almost always with reprobation. To complete his miserable condition, he is cut off from prayer. No person who intends to sin can pray. No person who intends to tempt himself, as the drunkard always does, can say, 'Lead me not into temptation; but deliver me from evil;' and no person who cannot pray can be saved. Thus the drunkard holds out to his family and to the world the deplorable spectacle of a sinner hardened beyond the common measure; exposing himself to sin of every kind, and in every degree, and yet voluntarily depriving himself of the usual means of repentance; hastening to perdition, and yet closing his eyes to the dangers of the precipice on which he stands, and to the terrors of the gulf which opens beneath.

IV. *I shall now endeavour summarily to point out the means of avoiding this dreadful evil.*

1. Among these means, it will be readily seen, must be *the avoidance of the causes by which intoxication is solicited or encouraged.*

Most of these causes may ordinarily be avoided by a little care, and a little resolution. No persons, except the family of the drunkard, are obliged to be present, unless casually, to examples of this nature. No person is necessitated to frequent the places in which, or the company of the persons by whom, this evil habit is encouraged. Every man can avoid regular drinking. That all this is the duty of every man, a duty of the most pressing kind, will not be

questioned. Every thing here depends on resisting, or avoiding, 'the beginnings of evil.'

Peculiarly is it the duty and wisdom of all men to abstain from the haunts of drunkenness, from drinking companions, and from regular drinking. Almost all habits of intoxication are originated by one or other of these causes. He who becomes familiar with these temptations, is advancing to perdition with his eyes open.

2. *The man who finds in himself any peculiar relish for spirituous liquors, is bound to abstain from them wholly.*

The relish for these increases invariably with every instance and degree of indulgence. To cherish it therefore, is to make ourselves drunkards; and it is cherished most efficaciously by repeated drinking. No man will do this, who is not a fair candidate for Bedlam.

3. *All persons who have already begun the habit of intoxication, are bound to desist absolutely from all use of strong drink.*

Every effort at gradual reformation will only cheat him who makes it. At first it may seem to promise something; but it will soon be found to perform nothing of any use. The candidate for reformation will speedily find himself more entangled than ever, and at a greater distance from the reformation intended. Hard as the case may be, he must break off at once, or be ruined.

4. *Persons not peculiarly in danger of this evil, are, nevertheless, bound scrupulously to guard against it.*

No reputation, no wisdom, nor hardly any worth, will secure man against drunkenness. This sin is found in the cottage, and in the palace; in the study of the philosopher, and in the sacred desk; in the hall of council, and on the bench of justice; and, contrary to what would seem the dictates of nature, as well as delicacy, in the female sex; even in instances where distinction, understanding, amiableness, and refinement would appear to forbid even the suspicion. In most, if not all of these cases, the

evil creeps insensibly on the unhappy subject, and overcomes him before he is aware. A prime object to be here regarded, is therefore, *to keep the danger always before our eyes.* We are ever to feel that we ourselves are in danger; and to consider an habitual lively dread of it as our first safety. We are to form also vigorous and standing resolutions, that we will not be overcome. These we are invariably to form in the fear of God, with a solemn recollection of his presence, with a humble dependance on him to bless us, and with fervent supplications for his blessing. To strengthen our resolutions, and to keep our fears awake, we are to mark the miserable victims of this sin with anxiety and terror; to regard the sin itself as 'the highway to hell;' and to realize, that in yielding to it we seal our own reprobation.

To all this conduct motives can never be wanting. Multitudes of the highest import, and the most commanding efficacy, have been already suggested in the progress of this Discourse. Every heart in this house, which is not formed of adamant, must have felt their force. Nothing pleads for it, except the mere appetite for strong drink; an appetite usually unnatural, and created by casual indulgence. All things else in heaven and in earth exclaim against it with a single voice. Our health, our reputation, our safety, our reason, our usefulness, our lives, our souls, our families, and our friends, in solemn and affecting union, urge, entreat, and persuade us to abstain. God commands, Christ solicits, the Spirit of grace influences, us to abstain. Angels and glorified saints behold our conduct with such anxiety and alarm as happy beings can feel, and watch and hope to see our escape. The law, with a terrible voice, thunders in our ears that dreadful denunciation, 'Drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.' Even hell itself, hostile as it is to our salvation, follows the rest of the universe; and, in spite of its own malevolence, subjoins its dreadful admonition, by marshalling before us the innumerable hosts of miserable wretches whom this sin has driven to its

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mansions of despair. Who, that does not already
sleep the sleep of death, can refuse to hear, awake,
and live?

SERMON CXIX.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

THE ORIGIN, NATURE, AND BENEFITS OF MARRIAGE.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.—EXOD. xx. 14.

BEFORE I enter upon the direct consideration of the precept in the text, it will be useful, for the purpose of illustrating and enforcing it, to examine the *nature of marriage*. The sin immediately forbidden in the text derives, in some respects, its existence from this *institution*; and is in all respects intimately connected with it, in whatever manner or degree the *sin* may exist. Such an examination also derives particular importance from the fact, that it has been rarely made in the desk. Indeed, I do not know where it has been made in such a manner as to satisfy my own wishes.

In discussing this subject I shall consider,

I. *The origin,*

II. *The nature,*

III. *The benefits of marriage.*

I. *The origin of marriage is from God.* In other words, *marriage is a divine institution.*

The proof of this position is complete in the following passage. Matt. xix. 3—6; 'The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered, and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife. and they twain shall

be one flesh? Wherefore, they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'

In this passage of Scripture our Saviour declares, that when God had created man male and female, he said, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh.' These, it is ever to be remembered, are the words of God himself, as they are here declared to be by Christ; and not, as they have often been erroneously supposed to be, the words of Adam. God made man male and female for this end, and in these words delivered his own ordinance to mankind; at once permitting and directing that a man henceforth should leave his father and mother, and that lawfully, notwithstanding his high and otherwise indissoluble obligations to them, and be united to his wife. Accordingly, he declares them henceforth to be '*no more twain, but one.*'

That these words contain an institution of God, and that this institution is marriage, cannot be doubted for a moment. The only question which can be asked concerning the subject is, for whom was this institution designed? Plainly it was not designed for Adam and Eve; for they had neither father nor mother, and were therefore not included in the terms of the ordinance; and, being already married by God himself, were necessarily excluded from any ordinance succeeding that event. The ordinance then respected their posterity only; and, as it is delivered in absolutely indifferent terms, terms unrestricted to any individuals, or collections of mankind, it respected all their posterity alike.

In this manner it is directly explained by our Saviour, in the passage quoted above. The Pharisees asked him 'whether it was lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?' Christ replies, that in consequence of this institution, a man and his wife are no more twain, but one; that is, a man and his wife, *at the time in which he was speaking, and from the time when this ordinance was made, are*

no more twain, but, from the day of their marriage, are by this ordinance constituted one. Accordingly, he subjoins, 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' As if he said, 'God hath joined together by this ordinance all men and women who are lawfully married; or, in other words, every lawfully married pair. Man, therefore, cannot lawfully disjoin them.' Here it is evident, beyond a debate, that our Saviour pronounced *men to be married, or joined together, at the time when he made these declarations, by God himself in this ordinance.* Of course the ordinance extends to all lawfully married persons.

II. The *nature of marriage* may be explained in the following manner:—

Marriage is a union between two persons of the different sexes. It is carefully to be remembered, that the ordinance of God, which gave birth to it, *limits the union to two.* God said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; not, Men shall leave *their fathers and mothers*, and shall cleave unto *their* wife; nor, A man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto *his wives*, and they twain shall be one: Not, *they* indefinitely, without declaring *how many*; nor, *they three, four, or five*; but '*they twain.*' The ordinance therefore, on which alone marriage is lawfully founded, limits this union, in the most express and definite manner, to *two persons.* What God has thus established, *man cannot alter.*

It is the most intimate union which exists in the present world. The persons who are united are joined together in a more intimate relation than any other which exists, or can exist, among mankind. No attachment is so strong, no tenderness is so great, as that which is originated and cherished by this institution. This is directly predicted, and very forcibly declared, in the passage which I have quoted from St. Matthew. 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one.' Accordingly

the union of affections, interests, labours, and life were existing, has no parallel in the present world.

It is also a perpetual union. The connexion is entered into by both parties *for life*. God has constituted it, by joining the parties with his own infinite authority; and has forbidden man to put them asunder. It is indissoluble therefore on any ground but that of *crime*; a crime of *one kind only*; and in its nature fatal to all the blessings and hopes intended by the institution.

It is a union also formed by a most solemn covenant. In this covenant God is appealed to, as a witness of the sincere affection and upright designs of the parties; both of whom engage mutually the exercise of those affections, and the pursuit of that conduct, which together are the most efficacious means of their mutual happiness. This covenant plainly approaches very near to the solemnity and obligation of an oath; and, exclusively of that in which man gives himself up to God, is, without a doubt, the most solemn and the most important ever entered into by man. When the duties of it are faithfully performed, they furnish a fair foundation for the best hopes that the union will be immortal.

III. *The benefits of this institution are incalculably numerous, and inestimably important.*

This truth is clearly evident from the observations already made, concerning the *origin* and *nature* of marriage. It is also forcibly evinced by the manner in which the subject is elsewhere exhibited in the Scriptures.

The violation of the marriage covenant was of such consequence in the view of the Divine mind, that it was made the subject of one of the commands in the decalogue.

In the laws concerning this subject given to the Israelites, curses were pronounced in form against the direct violations of the marriage vow, and the violators were punished with death.

Of adulterers, and all other transgressors of the seventh command, it is declared, in the New Tes-

tament, that 'they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.'—'None of those who go in to the strange woman,' says Solomon, 'turn again; neither take they hold of the paths of life.'

The relation between Christ and his church, is throughout the Scriptures exhibited as a marriage. God says to his church, 'Thy Maker is thy husband. Jehovah of Hosts is his name.' The angel in the Revelation styles the church, 'The bride, the Lamb's wife.'

From these, and other similar exhibitions of this subject in the Scriptures, it must necessarily be supposed, that God regarded marriage as pre-eminently important and beneficial to mankind.

The benefits of marriage, however, like those of every other practical concern, are chiefly to be learned from facts. I shall therefore apply directly to that extensive source of information; and exhibit, with a brief survey, such of these benefits, unfolded by human experience, as the present opportunity will permit.

1. *Marriage is extensively the means of comfort to the married pair.*

This was originally proposed by God as an important end of the institution. 'And the Lord God said, It is not good, that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him.' Accordingly, this end has been regularly accomplished from the beginning.

Licentious men, both of ancient and modern times, have carried on a course of open and incessant hostility against this institution; as they have, indeed, against all the real interests of mankind. In the progress of this warfare, they have arraigned the wisdom, and denied the benefits of it; charged upon it evils which it does not produce, and enhanced those which are incident to the marriage state. The unhappy marriages which have been contracted in violation of the law of our nature and of the Scriptures, comparatively few in number, and only excep-

tions to the general truth under discussion, they have multiplied without consideration or integrity; and have brought them up to the public view as just exhibitions of the marriage state in general. In a word, they have treated this subject as they customarily treat others of a serious nature; they have misstated facts, they have sophisticated arguments, and, where neither would answer their purpose, they have endeavoured to accomplish it by contempt, sneers, and ridicule.

This conduct, censurable and mischievous as it is, is perhaps not to be wondered at in men of such a character. But it is to be wondered at, that men of a far better character should have followed their steps. A man of even moderate reflection must be equally surprised and wounded, to see how many otherwise respectable writers in the peculiarly enlightened kingdom of Great Britain have, in a greater or less degree, lent their names to foster the wretched calumnies and falsehoods heaped so undeservedly upon this subject.

That there are unhappy marriages, and that the number of them is considerable, I am not disposed to question. There are many persons whose passions are too violent, or whose temper is too sordid, to permit them to be happy in any situation. Persons marry at times whose dispositions are wholly incompatible with each other. There are vicious persons, who will neither be happy themselves, nor suffer others to be happy. All these, it is readily conceded, will find little happiness in the marriage-state.

The propensities, inwrought into our nature as a law, and the declarations of Scripture, teach us alike, and irresistibly, that this union is to be formed only on the ground of affection, regulated by prudence. On this plan, and on this only, can marriage be reasonably expected to be happy. We are not therefore to wonder, that persons who marry for the purposes of allying themselves to families of distinction, acquiring or repairing fortunes, obtaining rank, or gratifying in any manner ambition, avarice, or sen-

quality, should afterward find themselves unhappy. These persons do not intentionally marry either husbands or wives. They marry distinction, fortunes, titles, villas, luxury, and grandeur. The objects to which they intentionally unite themselves they acquire. It cannot be wondered at that they do not gain those which they never sought ; nor that they do not find the blessings of marriage following plans and actions which, unless incidentally, have no relation to marriage. These persons, it is true, find the objects to which they are really wedded, encumbered by beings who stand in the places of husbands and wives. Still, they cannot form even a pretence for complaining ; since, with their eyes open, they voluntarily subject themselves, for the sake of such gratifications, to all the evils arising out of the encumbrance. The person who wishes to obtain the blessings designed by this or any other institution of God, must intentionally conform to the nature and spirit of the institution itself, and to all the precepts concerning it by which he has manifested his own pleasure.

I have lived in very many families, and those often in plain as well as polished life. With very many more, extensively diversified in character and circumstances, I have been intimately acquainted. By the evidence arising from these facts I am convinced, that the great body of married persons are rendered more happy by this union, and are as happy as their character and their circumstances could permit us to expect. Poverty cannot, whether in the married or single state, enjoy the pleasures of wealth ; avarice, those of generosity ; ambition, those of moderation ; ignorance, those of knowledge ; vulgarity, those of refinement ; passion, those of gentleness ; nor vice, in whatever form, those of virtue. The evils here specified, marriage, it is true, cannot remove. Nor are they removeable by celibacy ; and where these evils exist, neither celibacy or marriage, can confer the contrary blessings. ‘ Grapes, e, will not grow upon thorns, nor figs upon this-

les. Nothing but folly can lead us to expect that this institution will change the whole nature of those who enter into it ; and, like a magical spell, confer knowledge, virtue, and loveliness upon beings who have neither.

2. *Another end of this institution, is the preservation and comfort of children.*

The experience of all ages and countries, so far as it has extended to this subject, has uniformly shewn, that the offspring of illicit concubinage suffer innumerable evils to which those born in wedlock are not subjected. In a prodigious multitude of instances they perish before, or immediately after, they are born. In a vast multitude of others, they die in the early periods of childhood. They suffer from hunger, cold, nakedness, negligence, the want of nursing, watching, medicine, and every other comfort of life. The peculiar affection of married parents, and the peculiar efforts to which it gives birth, have ever been indispensable to the preservation of children from these evils, the establishment of their health, and the continuance of their lives. Children need ten thousand supplies, cares, and tenderesses, which nothing but this affection will ever furnish ; and without which, they either die suddenly, or waste away with a lingering dissolution.

This work, of raising up children from infancy to manhood, is the most laborious of all our worldly concerns ; and requires more efforts of both body and mind, more toil, care, patience, and perseverance than any other. To most men, indeed, it is a great part of all which ordinarily they find to do in their secular business.

For this great work, God, with wisdom which can never be sufficiently admired, has made effectual provision by the parental tenderness, always existing and flourishing in married parents with so few exceptions as to demand no attention here ; but always withered, and commonly destroyed, by promiscuous concubinage. This tenderness neither time nor toil, neither care nor anxiety, neither trou-

ble nor disappointment, neither filial ingratitude nor filial profligacy, can overcome, exhaust, or discourage. Other affections become cold, wearied, and disheartened; and are often converted into negligence, or hatred. But this, like the celestial fire in the Jewish temple, burns by night and by day; and is, through this world, an everlasting flame, which cannot be extinguished. Without it, what would become of children in poverty, in their rebellion, and in their profligacy? Who would watch over them; who relieve, supply, endure, and forgive?

In promiscuous concubinage children would be left to the mercy of the world, to the supplies of accident, to the charity of the street, to the bleak and desolate waste, to the frozen hospital, and to the inclemencies of the sky, to pine with hunger, to chill with nakedness, to shrivel with unkindness, to consume with premature disease, to die an untimely death, and, denied a grave, now the privilege even of beggars, to feed the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven.

3. *This institution is the source of all the natural relations of mankind.*

By these I mean the relations of husband and wife (which in a subordinate sense may be called natural), those of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, together with many others, which are of considerable, although of inferior importance. These relations are immensely more interesting and useful to the world than any, nay, than all others. They connect mankind by bonds far more intimate, delightful, and enduring; resist incomparably more the irregular, evil, and stormy passions of man; soften his rugged nature, overthrow his violent purposes, and spread through the world a degree of peace and moderation which without them would be impossible.

4. *This institution is the source of all the gentle and useful natural affections.*

These are conjugal tenderness, parental love, filial piety, and brotherly and sisterly attachment; far the

most amiable, endearing, permanent, and useful, native affections of man. No other affections have originally any softness, sweetness, or loveliness; but all owe to these every thing which is of this nature. All our native amiableness is awakened by the presence of those whom we love; and we originally love those only who form the domestic circle within which we were born; those from whom we early received the offices of tenderness. Here natural affection first springs; here also it grows and flourishes; and from its stem, deeply rooted here, sends abroad its boughs and branches, its blossoms and fruits. The mind here strengthened and refined, begins to wander abroad into the neighbourhood, to find new objects for attachment in other families. Relations, less near, easily slide into affection, and are enrolled by it in the list of those whom it loves. To these succeed, in their turns, a train of friends, neighbours, and countrymen; until the sphere swells beyond the limits of its comprehension. What would this world be without these affections, and without the conduct to which they give birth? Nothing good would ever be begun, much less be carried on, and conducted to a prosperous conclusion. But these affections commence, are cherished, and confirmed in families only; and without them would either never exist at all, or be mere abortions.

5. *This institution is the source of all industry and economy.*

Industry is the source, and economy the preservation of all the comfortable subsistence of man. But industry, as is proverbially observed, is not natural to the human race. On the contrary, it is the result of education and habit only. Accordingly, the savages of all countries, being uneducated to industrious exertion, are lazy in the extreme, and are roused to toil only by the calls of hunger. This habit cannot even be begun, as the education whence it is derived cannot exist to any considerable extent, but in families; nor by any other persons, except

parents ; nor at any other period, beside childhood. Without families, indeed, industry would not exist ; and without industry the world would be a desert.

Economy is not less necessary to human comfort than industry, and is still more unnatural to man. It demands the attention of every day to those things which we are to preserve ; and this attention is more irksome than labour itself. Fewer persons overcome their reluctance to it. Savages are always squanderers. Exposed as they perpetually are to want and famine, and frequently and distressingly as they suffer from these evils, such is their reluctance to this employment, that they go on from age to age, wasting, suffering, and perishing.

Early, watchful, and long-continued education will alone establish a habit either of industry, or economy. The attention, the authority, and the example of parents are all equally and indispensably necessary to the creation of this habit ; and without them all, it cannot in any extensive manner exist. Savages, indeed, have families ; and are married parents. It may, therefore, be asked, why *their* children are not educated to these habits ? The answer I have already given. Neither the attention, authority, nor example of *savage* parents are at all exerted for this end, so far as their male children are concerned ; and very imperfectly with respect to those of the other sex. Of these, however, both the industry and economy fully answer to the degree of education which they receive, and to the opportunities which they enjoy of exercising them. My position is, that, without a domestic education, these things would never exist : not that that education, be it what it may, or that a mere domestic existence will give them birth. Besides, savage parents neither understand nor perform the great body of duties created by this institution. Yet even they, in these, as well as in other important particulars, derive real and considerable advantages from the domestic state.

Without industry and economy, what would become of mankind ? Their enjoyments, their im-

provements, their virtues, and their hopes, would all vanish at once: nay, their very subsistence would disappear. The earth within a few years would be emptied of ninety-nine hundredths of its inhabitants. Europe would be changed into a Lapland waste; and these States into a Patagonian forest.

6. *This institution is the source of all education to useful knowledge, and to civility and sweetness of manners.*

Parents are the only persons who love children sufficiently well to be anxious about their education in any thing. Nor would any others support them, while obtaining their education. No others would teach them those indispensable things which they learn at home. By whom are schools built? By a collection of families. By whom are the instructors supported? By a collection of families assembled in a neighbourhood. By whom are colleges erected, instructors sustained, libraries furnished, and other means of superior education supplied? By large collections of families; such collections as have actually raised *these* buildings, stocked them with all their furniture, and sent hither the youths who are now before me, for education.

Education occupies a great part of childhood and youth; and is a long-continued, laborious, expensive, and often a discouraging concern. Ordinary feelings would supply neither the labour, nor the expense. Parents only experience the necessary affection. Families only could sustain the necessary expense.

Much of the education of children is furnished by example, and is dependant on the propensity to imitation. This principle operates powerfully upon children in the early periods of life, because it is stronger at that than at any future age; and because they are continually in the midst of ~~those~~ whose example they are most disposed to follow, both from ~~peculiar affection~~ and from the fact, that it is always ~~before them~~.

But the efficacy of this principle operates powerfully also in another way. Parents love to be like other parents, and to have their children like other children. When, therefore, the children of one family are furnished with the advantages of education, the parents of other children in the neighbourhood are prompted to educate them also; not only by ambition, but by the general disposition which we have to be like others.

At the same time, and under the same authority of parents, civility and softness of manners are begun and established in families. Here only arise the affections out of which this ornamental part of the human character springs. In no other place, among no other persons, and in no other circumstances, can these affections find their proper objects, or their proper motives. Of course, in no other place can they begin to exist. Much less can they elsewhere find room for that continual exercise, that delightful interchange, which is absolutely necessary to their strength and permanency. From families only, therefore, can the world derive the innumerable blessings flowing from these sources.

7. This institution is the source of all subordination and government; and, consequently, of all order, peace, and safety in the world.

In a family children are taught, as soon as they are taught any thing, to obey; and to obey those who, loving them tenderly, are the fit, and the only fit, persons to govern them, or to teach them submission and obedience. Others would rule them only with the rod of power; with a despotism, from which they would think it a privilege to escape; a dominion, from which, as soon as possible, they would revolt; an authority, which they would hate; and submission to which would be such an evil, as naturally to make them hate all other authority.

But parents rule with tenderness and love; and usually engage the strong affection of children to the authority which they exercise, and to themselves while exercising it. The children learn to obey

from choice, and are pleased with the very employment of obeying.

Obedience is also taught here in that early period of life, at which it is impressed so deeply as never to be effaced. Impressions of every kind made at this period are, it is well known, indelible, and survive all others; especially, when made by those in whom tenderness and authority are united, and to whom reverence and affection are rendered in the highest degree. This, however, is not all. These impressions are daily and hourly repeated; and by this repetition are gradually wrought into an immoveable habit. In this manner they become the only visible nature of the child, and constitute his chief, and often his only character.

In this manner, and only in this manner, are children effectually prepared to submit to all other lawful authority. In this manner they become peaceful and orderly through life, imbibe a spirit of respect and kindness towards others, are formed into good members of society, and fitted to sustain the character of good neighbours and good friends. Equally necessary is this discipline to make them good subjects, and good magistrates. Few persons are good subjects of civil government, who have not been trained to this character by a wise domestic administration: and not one of these would sustain this character, but for the example of those who have been thus trained. It is proverbially true also, that none are qualified to govern, except those who have early learned to obey.

In hardly any thing is the institution of marriage, and the consequent formation of families, exhibited as more necessary, or more wise, than in this origination and establishment of good order in the world. 'Order,' as Mr Pope has justly observed, 'is heaven's first law.' The great task of establishing it among such beings as we are—selfish, revolting, and refractory—God has assigned to an innumerable multitude of hands; a multitude sufficiently great to receive it in portions, so small and so cir-

cumstanced, as to ensure both the ability and inclination to accomplish it effectually. These portions are so small, as to involve only the children of a single family. To this little flock are given regularly two rulers, better disposed and better qualified, in almost all instances, than any other persons found in the world. The circumstances in which those are placed who are to be governed, are more favourable to the accomplishment of this great end, than any others can be. Their infancy, childhood, and youth, in succession; their ignorance, feebleness, dependance; the affection, superiority, care, and kindness of the parents; and the instinctive love and reverence of the children; together with their necessary and long-continued residence in the parental mansion; present to the contemplative eye a combination of things evidencing, by their supreme and singular adaptation to this important purpose, a glorious work of the wisdom of God. Fewer hands could not possibly accomplish this mighty task. All the wisdom of legislation, all the energy of despotism, would be spent upon it in vain. Millions of minds, and tongues, and hands are indispensable to it, even in a single country. It is, beyond calculation, a greater and more arduous work than all the labours of all rulers, legislative, executive, and judicial, united. Nor could those to whom it is intrusted accomplish it in any other circumstances. Children, grown up to manhood without government, could never be governed. A generation of such children would set at defiance all the laws and magistrates in the universe; and would never yield to any control, but that of the sword. Were parents to intermit their labours during a single generation, no government could thenceforth exist in that country, until terrible necessity should force upon it a military despotism. Anarchy, until that period, would rear its wild misrule, ravage every human interest, and rase every human dwelling. In this very land, flourishing and wantoning in all the blessings of liberty, the musket, the dungeon, and

the gibbet would be the only means of public peace, order, and safety.

8. *Marriage is the source of all the religion which exists in the world.*

This important truth is completely evident from the following particulars :

(1.) *Persons living in promiscuous concubinage are never themselves religious.*

There never was a single instance of this nature since the world began. The very first step towards religion, whenever they have ultimately become religious, has invariably been repentance, and reformation of this enormous sin. Such persons can therefore never teach their children religion, either by precept or example. Therefore,

(2.) *Their children grow up, of course, in irreligion.*

There are two primary means of grace: the preaching of the gospel, and the religious education of children. Of these, Baxter supposes *religious education* to be probably the principal, as to its efficacy, wherever the gospel is regularly established. But, whatever be their comparative importance, it is sufficient to say, what cannot be denied, that children who are not educated religiously, rarely become religious, even in the midst of those who are thus educated; and that a generation of such children would of course, be a generation of profligates. But married persons only ever educate their children religiously; or present to them that example, without which their instructions would be given to no purpose.

(3.) *None but married parents build churches, support ministers, or frequent the worship of God.*

That the irreligion of persons living in promiscuous concubinage would never give birth to these things, nor to any of them, needs no proof. But without all these things, religion, as the world is constituted, cannot exist. The loss of the sabbath alone soon becomes, every where, the loss of religion. The preaching of the gospel, united with the ordinances of public worship, is the only effectual means of keep-

ing religious education alive in the world. Religious education, in its turn, gives existence and life to public worship; and both united are the great and efficacious means of continuing the kingdom of God, and producing the salvation of man.

Such, in a summary view, are *the origin, the nature, and the benefits of marriage*. No man of common sobriety can hesitate to acknowledge that these benefits are inestimable and immense. Of course, the institution whence they were derived, and without which they would not exist, is of incomprehensible importance to mankind. How worthy of the wisdom of the Infinite Mind is the erection of so vast and so glorious a fabric, upon a foundation so simple, apparently so inadequate, and yet proved by all the experience of man to be sufficiently extensive, solid and enduring! How small a cause to the human eye is here seen to produce effects, innumerable in their multitude, and supreme in their importance: What serious mind can hesitate to acknowledge, that such a work is wrought by the counsel of God!

SERMON CXX.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT.

LEWDNESS.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.—EXOD. xx. 14.

HAVING in the preceding Discourse considered the origin, nature, and benefits of marriage; the institution, which is the basis of the prohibition in the text; I shall now proceed to examine the *prohibition* itself.

The thing, which is here universally prohibited, is *lewdness*: lewdness in every form; in thought, word, and action. This is unanswerably evident from our

Saviour's comment on this precept; 'He that looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.'

Before I begin the immediate discussion of this subject, I shall premise a few general observations.

It is universally known, that there is, and for a great length of time has been, a riveted prejudice against the introduction of this subject into the desk. When the peculiar delicacy attending it is considered, it cannot be thought strange, that such a prejudice should in some degree exist. Even the most chaste and correct observations concerning it are apt to give pain, or at least to excite an alarm in a refined and apprehensive mind. What nature itself, perhaps, dictates, custom and manners have not a little enhanced. The opinions and feelings to which I have referred, have been carried to a length unwarranted either by the Scriptures, or common sense. The subject seems, in fact, to have been banished from the desk; and ministers, by their general and profound silence concerning it, appear to have sanctioned the conclusion, that there is one, and that not a small part of Scripture, which, so far as preaching is concerned, is not 'profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, nor for instruction in righteousness.'

But let me solemnly ask every religious man, whether this conduct can be justified? The 'rejoicing' of St. Paul, at the close of his life, was 'the testimony of a good conscience, that not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, he had his conversation in the world;' the testimony of a good conscience, that he was 'pure from the blood of all men,' because 'he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.' Is it not a plain and prominent part of the counsel of God, to forbid, to discourage, to prevent this profligate conduct of mankind? Why else was this precept inserted in the decalogue, and promulgated amid the lightnings of Sinai? Why else is it throughout the Scriptures made the subject of such forcible prohibitions, and

the object of such awful threatenings?

What reason can be given, why it should not be introduced into the desk? Can common sense either prove or discern the usefulness of excluding it? Is it fit, is it safe, is it not preposterous, is it not ruinous to the best interests of mankind, to leave the whole management of it to loose and abandoned men; and to suffer them from year to year, and from century to century, to go on in a course of corruption, seducing and destroying thousands and millions, especially of the young, the gay, and the giddy; while we, ministers of Christ, divinely appointed to watch for the souls of men, quietly sit by, and see them hurried on to perdition? Shall we be awed by the cry of indelicacy, originally raised by the most indelicate of mankind, only to keep the field open for its own malignant occupancy? Shall we not infinitely rather lay hold on every opportunity and all the means furnished here, as well as elsewhere, to rescue our fellow-creatures from destruction.

And shall not the house of God, and this sacred day, both divinely consecrated, not only to his worship at large, but to this very end, that 'the wicked' may be 'warned of the error of his way, that he turn from it, and save his soul alive,' shelter this subject, a solemn, prominent subject of his own express commands, awful exhortations, and terrible threatenings, from misconception, sport, and sneer? Shall not the known presence of this tremendous Being in his house, silence every unscriptural complaint, check every wayward thought, forbid every roving of an unhallowed imagination, and appal every light-minded sinner, however prone he may be to forget the presence of his Maker, or unwilling to remember, that this great Being is, at the very time, 'searching his heart, and trying his reins,' to reward him according to his works?

But why, it may be asked, may not the evil be left to other correctives? Why is it necessary that ministers of the gospel should make it the theme of their public discourses? Why may not the business

of reformation be intrusted to the satirist, the poet, and the moralist; to private conversation, and to the religious instruction of parents? The answer to these questions is at hand. God has required ministers to 'cry aloud and spare not; to lift up their voices as a trumpet; and to shew his people their transgressions.' He has declared to ministers, that 'if they warn not the wicked of his way, the wicked shall die in his sins; but his blood he will require at their hands.' The point in debate must, I think, be allowed to be here finally settled; unless some argument can be devised to shew, that a minister is bound to make himself answerable for the blood of those sinners to whom he preaches. Besides, the satirist, the poet, and the moralist, in a multitude of instances, have been enlisted on the side of vice, and have endeavoured to stimulate, rather than repress, the evil under examination. Where they are not, how few persons read their books, compared with the number of those who are present at the preaching of the gospel! Probably two-thirds of a million of persons hear the gospel preached weekly in New England. Not one in a thousand of these, perhaps, has ever read a book seriously exposing this unhappy part of the human character. Even where their books are read, and read with attention, they are little regarded, and produce little effect. The desk possesses means of appalling and overthrowing vice, and upholding morality which nothing else can boast. The day, the place, the circumstances of the assembly, the purposes for which they are gathered, and the solemn commission of Jehovah, furnish ministers with advantages for this great end, unrivalled and unexampled. Accordingly, their office has been more efficacious in producing real reformation, than all the other means employed by man. 'The pulpit,' says a poet of distinguished excellence and wisdom,

'The pulpit, when the sat'rist has at last,
Strutting and vap'ring in an empty school.'

Spent all his force, and made no proselyte,
I say the pulpit, in the sober use
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers,
Must stand acknowledg'd, while the world shall
stand,
The most important and effectual guard,
Support, and ornament, of virtue's cause.'

With these things in view, I consider it as my own duty to bring this subject into the desk without hesitation, and to treat it in the same definite and earnest manner which is demanded by the precepts of the gospel. I shall make it my business, however, to treat it in such a manner, that if any of my audience shall entertain thoughts concerning it, forbidden by their Creator, it shall be their own fault, and not mine.

With these preliminary remarks, I proceed to observe,

I. *That this command forbids all impure thoughts.*

The proof of this I have already given in our Saviour's comment on this precept.

Impure thoughts are the immediate and only sources of impure conversation, and an impure life. If the thoughts be cleansed, the man will be clean of course.

There is scarcely a more dangerous employment, than the indulgence of a licentious imagination. This is an evil to which youths are peculiarly exposed. The peculiar strength of every passion, and the peculiar want of watchfulness and self-restraint, render them an easy prey to every vice which solicits admission. Still greater is the danger, when vice approaches under a form especially alluring; and, at the same time, steals gradually, and therefore insensibly, upon the mind. By all these evils is the sin under consideration accompanied. It rises in the minds of the young instinctively, surrounded with many allurements, and unaccompanied by that loathing and horror with which the mind naturally regards vice of many other kinds. At the same time, the mind is prone to be utterly

unconscious of any transgression, and of any danger. The imagination, thoughtless and unrestrained, wanders over the forbidden ground, often without thinking that it is forbidden ; and has already been guilty of many and perilous transgressions, when it is scarcely aware of having transgressed at all. In this manner its attachment to these excursions continually gains strength. Continually are they repeated with more eagerness, and with more frequency. At length they become habitual ; and scarcely any habit is stronger, or with less difficulty overcome. In every leisure season, the mind, if it will watch its own movements, will find itself roving without restraint, and often without being aware that it has begun to rove, on this interdicted ground ; and will be astonished to perceive, after a sober computation, how great a part of all its thinking is made up of these licentious thoughts.

Most unhappily, aids and allurements to this licentious indulgence are never wanting. Genius, in every age, and in every country, has to a great extent prostituted its elevated powers for the deplorable purpose of seducing thoughtless minds to this sin. The unsuspecting imagination, ignorant of the dangers which are spread before it, has, by this gay and fiery serpent, glittering with spots of gold, and painted with colours of enchantment, been allured to pluck the fruit of this forbidden tree, and hazard the death denounced against the transgression. The numbers of the poet, the delightful melody of song, the fascination of the chisel, and the spell of the pencil, have been all volunteered in the service of Satan, for the moral destruction of unhappy man. To finish this work of malignity, the stage has lent all its splendid apparatus of mischief, the shop been converted into a show-box of temptations, and its owner into a pander of iniquity. Feeble, erratic, and giddy, as the mind of man is in its nature ; prepared to welcome temptation, and to hail every passing sin ; can we wonder that it should yield to this formidable train of seducers ?

To a virtuous mind scarcely any possession is of more value, or more productive of enjoyment or safety, than a chastened imagination, regularly subjected to the control of the conscience. Wherever this faculty is under this control, the mind has achieved a power of keeping temptation at a distance, of resisting it when approaching, and of overcoming it when invading, attainable in no other manner. Its path towards heaven becomes therefore comparatively unobstructed, easy, and secure. Sin does not easily beset it; and its moral improvement, while it is on the one hand undisturbed, is on the other rapid and delightful.

II. *This command forbids all licentious words of the same nature.*

Impure thoughts beget impure words; and impure words, in their turn, generate, enhance, and multiply impure thoughts. This retro-active influence of the tongue upon the heart, by means of which sinful conversation becomes the means of producing sinful thoughts, I have had occasion to explain at large in a former Discourse. It will therefore be unnecessary to dwell upon it here. No serious observer of human life can doubt, that by our own language, as well as that of others, whenever it is impure, impure thoughts are awakened; a licentious imagination set on fire; and licentious designs, which otherwise would never have entered the mind, called up into existence and execution.

In this employment also our fellow-men unite with us in the strange and melancholy purpose of mutual corruption. All the dangers and mischiefs, all the temptations and sins, presented to each other by evil companions, are to be found here. Here, 'wicked men and seducers wax worse and worse; deceiving, and being deceived;' mutually seducing, and being seduced.

The only safety, with respect to this part of the subject in hand, is found in an exact conformity to the very forcible precept of St. Paul: 'But filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting, let it not be so

much as named among you.' The original words are *αισχροτης*, obscenity; *μωρολογια*, impure scurrility, and *ευτραπεια*, when used in a bad sense, as here, answering to *double entendres*, or seemingly decent speeches with double meanings. Of all these the apostle says not, Let them not be used; but, 'Let them not be, so much as named among you, as becometh saints.' Let no foundation be furnished by your conversation even for mentioning it as a fact, that such language has ever been uttered by you. For no conversation beside that which is thus pure, can become your character as Christians. See Eph. v. 3, 4. Strict and virtuous delicacy in our language is not only indispensable to decency and dignity of character, but to all purity of heart, and all excellency of life.

III. *This command forbids all licentious conduct of this nature.*

As this position will not be questioned, and as this conduct, in every form, is prohibited elsewhere, in a multitude of scriptural passages, I shall spare myself the labour of proof; and shall proceed to suggest several reasons for our obedience to this precept; or, what is the same thing, to mention several evils arising from disobedience.

1. *The licentious conduct forbidden by this precept, discourages and prevents marriage.*

This discouragement and prevention regularly take place in exact proportion to the prevalence of the conduct; and are therefore chargeable upon it, whenever, and wherever, and however it exists.

The innumerable and immense blessings of the marriage institution have been summarily recited in the preceding Discourse. They are the blessings which keep the moral world in being, and secure it from an untimely and most terrible dissolution. They are the blessings, without which life, in instances literally innumerable, would be blasted in the bud; without which, when it escaped this premature destruction, its continuance would prove a curse; without which, natural affection and amiableness would

not exist ; without which, domestic education would be extinct ; industry and economy never begin ; and man be left to the precarious subsistence of a savage. But for this institution, learning, knowledge, and refinement would expire ; government sink in the gulf of anarchy ; and religion, hunted from the habitations of men hasten back to her native heavens. Man, in the mean time, stripped of all that is respectable, amiable, or hopeful in his character, and degraded to all that is odious, brutal, and desperate, would prowl in solitudes and deserts, to satisfy his rage and hunger. The correspondence between heaven and earth would cease ; and the celestial inhabitants would no longer expect, nor find, new accessions to their happy society from this miserable world.

To all these evils every lewd man directly contributes. Were his principles and practices adopted universally by his fellow-men, all these evils would universally prevail. That they do not actually thus prevail, is in no sense owing to him. To the utmost of his power he labours to introduce them all.

2. This conduct, in almost all cases, presupposes seduction.

Seduction, in its very nature, involves fraud of the worst kind. It is probably always accomplished by means of the most solemn promises, and often with oaths still more solemn. Both the promises and oaths, however, are violated in a manner supremely profligate and shameful. The object to which they are directed is base, malignant, and treacherous in the extreme ; and the manner in which it is prosecuted is marked with the same treachery and baseness. He who can coolly adopt it has put off the character of a man, and put on that of a fiend ; and, with the spirit of a fiend alone, he pursues and accomplishes the infernal purpose. The ruin sought and achieved is immense. It is not the filching of property. It is not the burning of a house. It is not the deprivation of liberty. It is not the destruction of life. The seducer plunders the wretched vic-

tim of character, morals, happiness, hope, and heaven; enthrals her in the eternal bondage of sin, consumes her beyond the grave in endless fire, and murders her soul with an ever-living death. With the same comprehensive and terrible malignity, he destroys himself; calls down upon his own head the vengeance of that almighty hand, which will suffer no sinner to escape; and awakens the terrors of that undying conscience, which will enhance even the agonies of perdition. All this is perpetrated, in the mean time, under strong professions of peculiar affection, with the persuasive language of tenderness, and with the smiles of gentleness and complacency. For, the seducer

‘ Can smile, and smile, and be a villain.’

3. *It brings incomprehensible wretchedness upon the devoted object.*

No human being can support the pressure of infamy, a degradation below the level of mankind, and the envenomed stings of reproach, sharpened by a guilty conscience. I well know, that philosophy prates and vapours on topics of this nature with a proud self-complacency, and an ostentatious display of patience, fortitude, and serenity. But I also well know, that philosophy is in these respects a mere pretender, a bully, and not a hero. Philosophy never furnished, and never will furnish, its catalogue of martyrs. All its votaries, like Voltaire, intend only to rule and triumph; not to suffer, nor even to submit. As cool and parading reflections on subjects of a calamitous nature are uttered in the peace of the closet, the possession of ease and safety, the conviction of acknowledged reputation, and the enjoyment of friends, comforts, and hopes; philosophy rarely encounters real sufferings. Her hardihood is all premature; and is all shewn in telling the world what she would do, and what others ought to do: and not in the history of what she has done.

The excruciating anguish to which the miserable female victim is reduced, is dreadfully exemplified

in the unnatural and enormous wickedness to which she is driven, in the desertion, and the consequent destruction, of her helpless offspring. 'Can a woman forget her sucking child; that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?' is a question which points out the strongest affection, the highest tenderness of human nature; the attachment which outruns, survives, and triumphs over every other. To this question, the exposure to a merciless sky, the drowning, the strangling, the smothering of illegitimate children, returns a terrible and excruciating answer. What must be the agonies of despondence and degradation which can force the susceptible heart of a female parent to the contrivance and execution of a design like this? Yet such is the dreadful catastrophe of the wickedness in question. It is worse than trifling, for the author of all these evils to allege, that this catastrophe is neither contrived or accomplished by himself. They are all, and are known by him to be, the frequent as well as natural consequences of this iniquity. They are chargeable to him therefore as the legitimate results of his own conduct; results, which by every obligation, human and divine, he was bound to foresee and prevent. Both the murder itself, and the miseries which give birth to it, are stains of that crimson guilt in which he is so deeply dyed.

4. *This licentious character soon becomes habitual.*

To a person moderately acquainted with human conduct, an attempt to prove this assertion would be mere trifling. All transgressions of this cast soon become fixed, obstinate, and irreclaimable. The world teems with evidence of this humiliating position; and the whole progress of time has daily accumulated a mountainous mass of facts, evincing its certainty in a more and more humiliating manner.

Of these, the most humiliating and dreadful collection is found in those baleful tenements of prostitution and profligacy which deform, so far as my information extends, every populous city on the globe; and stand publicly as the gate-way to hell, opening

to their miserable inhabitants a broad and beaten road to ruin. Into these deplorable mansions the polluted female, cast off by mankind as an outlaw from human society, shorn even from the side of natural affection, and parental mercy, betrayed by the villany of a second Judas, and hurried by shame, remorse, and anguish, enters—never to escape! Here, from the first moment, she closes her eyes upon friends, kindness, and compassion; takes her final farewell of earthly comfort; and sees, with a dying eye, the last glimmerings of hope go out in eternal night. Here she bids an everlasting adieu to the sabbath, the house, and the word of God. To her the calls of mercy are made no more. To her the voice of the Redeemer sounds no more. The Spirit of truth cannot be supposed to enter the haunts of sin and death; nor to shed the dew of life upon these voluntary victims of corruption by whom they are inhabited. Immortal life here becomes extinct. Hither the ‘hope’ of heaven ‘never comes, that comes to all:’ and the wretched throng, embosomed by these baleful walls, enter upon their perdition on this side of the grave.

Who, that is not lost to candour, and buried in misanthropy, could believe, unless he were forced to believe, that princes, and other rulers of mankind, have taxed and licensed these houses of ruin; and that in countries where the gospel beams, and the voice of salvation is heard in the streets? Who could believe that sin would be thus bartered in the market; and damnation be holden up as a commodity for bargain and sale; that the destruction of the human soul would be publicly announced, granted, and authorized, as a privilege; and that patents would be made out, signed, and sealed, for populating more extensively the world of woe?

In the mean time, it is ever to be remembered that the betrayer accompanies to the same dreadful end the victim of his treachery. ‘None, who go into’ these outer chambers of perdition, ‘turn again whether take they hold of the paths of life.’

5. *This conduct destroys all moral principle.*

‘ However it be accounted for,’ says Dr. Paley, ‘ the criminal commerce of the sexes corrupts and depraves the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatsoever. That ready perception of guilt, that prompt and decisive resolution against it, which constitutes a virtuous character, is seldom found in persons addicted to these indulgences. They prepare an easy admission for every sin that seeks it; are in low life usually the first stage in men’s progress to the most desperate villanies; and in high life to that lamented dissoluteness of principle, which manifests itself in a profligacy of public conduct, and a contempt of the obligations of religion and moral probity.’

What is here asserted by this very able writer, forced itself upon my mind many years before I saw the work containing these observations, as a strong and prominent feature in the character of man. These very declarations I have long since seen amply verified in living examples. This progress towards abandonment cannot be very easily described, much less thoroughly explained, except in a detailed account of the subject. Such an account cannot here be given. Yet the following observations will, if I mistake not, contribute to illustrate the point in question.

Almost all persons, perhaps all, derive from early instruction and habituation a greater or less degree of conscientiousness; a reverence for God, a sense of accountableness, a fixed expectation of future rewards and punishments, a veneration for truth and justice, and an established conviction of the excellence of kindness. These united constitute that temperament of mind, on which evangelical virtue is usually as well as happily grafted; and to exterminate them is to destroy what is here meant by all moral principle.

Persons who commit the crimes which form the principal subject of this Discourse always commit them in secret. After they are committed, the same

secrecy is indispensable to the safety of the perpetrators. There must be, however, there are unavoidably, some persons who, at times, and in one manner and another, become acquainted with the wickedness. These must be engaged, at all events, to conceal what they know. To effectuate this purpose, the perpetrators are often driven to employ the grossest corruption, and the basest and most profligate measures. Agents also are often absolutely necessary to the successful accomplishment of the crimes themselves. None but abandoned men can become such agents; and none but abandoned measures can be employed with respect to their agency. As the principal criminal makes progress in this iniquity, such persons become more and more necessary to him, and familiar with him; and as, during his progress, he renders himself an object of detestation to all decent society, these profligates soon become his only companions, and these measures his only conduct. He who devotes himself to such companions and such conduct, will always debase and corrupt his own mind faster than he is aware; and, with an unexpected rapidity in guilt, will very soon become a mere profligate.

Nor will he be less rapidly corrupted by the innumerable vile expedients, base fetches, treacherous plans, abominable briberies, and foul perjuries to which he resorts for the successful perpetration of his villanous designs. To all these must be added, the putrefactive influence of impurity itself; which, as the pestilence through the body, diffuses mortification and rottenness throughout the soul; and converts it into a mere mass of death and corruption.

Conformably to these observations, we see, in the ordinary course of things, that impurity manures and waters every other growth of sin. Wherever it prevails all crimes become gross, rank, and premature. Impiety, blasphemy, treachery, drunkenness, perjury, and murder flourish around it. How justly then, as well as how solemnly, did the divine writer declare, concerning the strange woman, ' Her house

is the way to hell ; going down to the chambers of death !

6. *Whenever this conduct assumes the flagrant character of adultery, it involves a numerous and dreadful train of additional evils.*

It involves the most open and gross violation of the marriage covenant ; and exposes the guilty person, therefore, to the peculiar wrath of that tremendous Being, invoked as a witness of it ; and incomprehensibly, as well as most impudently, affronted by the violation.

It accomplishes the greatest injury which the innocent party to that covenant can receive, on this side of the grave. This injury is formed of a vast combination of sufferings, reaching every important interest in this world always, and often in the world to come ; exquisitely keen and poignant, piercing the very seat of thought, and sense, and feeling, and awakening in long succession throes of agony and despair. The husband, for example, is forced to behold his wife, once and always beloved beyond expression, but less affectionate than beloved, and hitherto untarnished even with suspicion, corrupted by fraud, circumvention, and villany ; seduced from truth, virtue, and hope ; and voluntarily consigned to irretrievable ruin. His prospects of enjoyment, and even of comfort, in the present world, are overcast with the blackness of darkness. Life to him is changed into a lingering death. His house is turned into an empty, dreary cavern. Himself is widowed. His children are orphans ; not by the righteous providence of God, but by the murderous villany of man. Clouded with woe, and hung round with despair, his soul becomes a charnel-house, where life, and peace, and comfort have expired ; a tomb, dark and hollow, covering the remains of departed enjoyment, and opening no more to the entrance of the living.

It involves injuries to the children which numbers cannot calculate, and which the tongue cannot describe. The hand of villany has robbed them of all their peculiar blessings ; the blessings of maternal

care and tenderness ; the rich blessings of maternal instruction and government ; the delightful and most persuasive blessings of maternal example ; the exalted privilege of united parental prayers ; and the exquisite enjoyments of a peaceful, harmonious, and happy fire-side ; once exquisitely happy, but now to be happy no more !

To this most affecting and pitiable train of mourners, a numerous and additional train of *friends* unite themselves, to deplore the common woe. A singular, an agonizing procession is formed, at the funeral of departed virtue. Tears stream, which no hand can wipe away. Groans ascend, which no comforter can charm to peace. Bosoms heave with anguish, which all the balm of Gilead cannot soothe. The object of lamentation is gone for ever ; and all that remains is a mass of living death, soon to be buried in the eternal grave.

7. *This wickedness, when it becomes extensive, over-spreads a country with final ruin.*

It is the nature of this evil, not only to become greater and greater in individuals, but to extend continually also to greater and greater numbers of individuals. The corruption of Sodom, and the neighbouring cities of the plain, was rapid and complete. Within a short period after they were built, ten righteous persons could not be found in them all. What was true of these cities is true of others in similar circumstances. To the Israelites, before they entered into Canaan, God prescribed a long series of laws, requiring absolute purity of conduct ; prohibiting in the most solemn manner lewdness of every kind ; and enacting against it the most dreadful penalties. ‘ Do not,’ said Jehovah, ‘ prostitute thy daughter ; lest the land become full of wickedness.’—‘ Ye shall not commit any of these abominations, that the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you.’ In the sight of God, therefore, this sin is peculiarly the source of corruption to a land ; a source, whence it becomes ‘ full of wickedness ;’ and vomits

out its inhabitants, as being unable to bear them. Those who practise it, and the nation in which the practice prevails, are, he declares, abhorred by him, and shall be finally destroyed. 'For whosoever, saith he, shall commit any of these abominations, that soul shall be cut off from his people.'

As crimes of this nature become less and less unfavourable to them, they become less and less scandalous, and by all who are inclined to perpetrate them are esteemed less and less sinful. Of course they are regarded with decreasing reluctance and horror. The father practises them, and with his example corrupts his son. The husband in the same manner corrupts his wife, the brother his brother, the friend his friend, and the neighbour his neighbour. Soon the brothel raises its polluted walls; and becomes a seminary of Satan, where crimes are provided, taught, perpetrated, multiplied without number, and beyond degree, and to a great extent concealed from the public eye. To one of these caverns of darkness and death another succeeds, and another, until the city, and ultimately the whole land, becomes one vast Sodom. Lost to every thought of reformation, and to every feeling of conscience, 'an astonishment, and a hissing, to mankind,' a reprobate of heaven, it invokes upon the heads of its putrid inhabitants a new tempest of fire and brimstone. Morals, life, and hope to such a community have expired. They breathe indeed, and move, and act, and to the careless eye appear as living beings. But the life is merely a counterfeit. They are only a host of moving corpses; an assembly of the dead, destined to no future resurrection. Disturbed and restless spectres, they haunt the surface of the earth in material forms, filling the sober and contemplative mind with alarm and horror, until they finally disappear, and hurry through the gloomy mansions of the grave to everlasting woe.

SERMON CXXI.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

POLYGAMY—DIVORCE.

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female; and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses, then, command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her, which is put away, doth commit adultery. His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying; save they to whom it is given.—MATT. XIX. 3—11.

THE next violation of the seventh command which I shall think it necessary to examine at large in this system, is *divorce*. Were I delivering a formal course of ethical lectures, I should feel myself obliged to extend the same examination to *polygamy*. As a practical subject in this country, it demands indeed little consideration. But from its inherent importance, and its extensive prevalence in the world; and still more from the fact, that it has been either

partially, or wholly, defended by some grave men, it deserves to become a subject of serious consideration. Thinking men ought on such a subject to have their opinions settled. For these reasons, although I cannot expatiate, I feel myself bound to make a few observations upon it in a summary manner.

Polygamy is unlawful, because God in the original institution of marriage confines it to the union of one man with one woman. 'For this cause,' said he, who created them male and female, 'shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh. Whom God, therefore, hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' God hath joined *two*. This is the only authority under which marriage lawfully exists. Polygamy is, therefore, a violation of the institution of God.

Polygamy appears to be directly forbidden in the Mosaic law. Lev. xviii. 18, 'Thou shalt not take a wife to her sister, to vex her, in her lifetime:' or, as it is in the margin, 'Thou shalt not take *one* wife to another.' The words, 'a wife to her sister,' Dr. Edwards observes, are found in the Hebrew, if I remember right, eight times. In every other passage, except that just quoted, they refer to inanimate objects: such as the wings of the cherubim, tenons, mortices, &c. They seem to denote, principally, the exact likeness of one thing to another; and here forbid, as the margin expresses it, 'the taking of one wife to another in her lifetime.'

Polygamy is forbidden in the Prophecy of Malachi. The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously; yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the Spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed,' Mal. ii. 14, 15.

The prophet, in this passage, although speaking of all the wives in the nation of Israel, yet mentions the word in the singular number only. Of the union

of one husband with one wife he declares God to have been witness ; and thus plainly indicates, that this union lawfully extended to no more. In the second verse quoted he asks, 'Did he not make one?' That is, *one wife*, when 'he had the residue of the Spirit,' and, could with the same ease have created many, if he had pleased. 'And wherefore *one*?' To this question he answers, 'That he might seek a godly seed.' In other words, he created one man and one woman, and united them, and them only, in the marriage institution, because one husband and one wife thus united, would, by religious education and example, promote piety in their offspring. This is an implicit, but clear and decisive declaration, that in a state of polygamy pious children would very rarely be found. Polygamy therefore cannot be lawful ; as being hostile to the design of God in this institution, and to the highest interest of mankind.

Polygamy is expressly forbidden in the text. Here, the man who puts away his wife, and marries another, is declared to commit adultery. In what does this adultery consist? Certainly not in putting away the former wife. A man may obviously leave his wife, or a woman her husband, and yet neither of them be at all guilty of this sin. The *adultery*, then, consists in the fact, *that the man marries a second wife while the first is living.* But this is always done in polygamy. Polygamy is therefore a continued state of adultery.

There is not a passage in the Scriptures, in which the institution of marriage, or the relation which it creates, is spoken of in the form either of doctrine or precept, which gives even a remote hint of the lawful union of more than two persons. Husband and wife are the terms invariably used in every case of this nature.

A bishop and a deacon, in an age when polygamy was common, are expressly required each to be a husband of one wife. Yet 'marriage is' declared to be 'honourable in all.' If polygamy, then, were at all the marriage spoken of, or the scriptural marriage, it would be honourable ; and therefore becoming and

proper in bishops and deacons ; and no reason appears for this restriction on them, any more than on other men.

The only instance of polygamy recorded in the Scriptures, during the first two thousand years after the institution of marriage, was that of Lamech ; and this appears to have been considered by himself, and those around him, as sinful. Noah and his three sons had but one wife each.

All the instances of polygamy, of which the history is given in the Scriptures to any extent, were sources of many and bitter calamities, both to the parents and children.

Equally hostile to this practice is the state of facts

The numbers of the sexes born, and living to adult years, in all nations and ages, have been so nearly equal, as to indicate plainly the will of the Author of our being, that one man and one woman, only, were to be united as parties in marriage. This equality is, indeed, denied by Mr. Bruce, with respect to Syria and Arabia ; and with no small appearance of being founded on evidence. But when I remember that it is a contradiction to the law of our nature in all ages, and in all other places ; that the fact is mentioned by no ancient or modern historian ; that Mr. Bruce, so far as my information extends, is the only traveller who has mentioned it ; particularly, that it escaped the observations of Shaw, Russel, Maundrel, and especially Nieburh ; I cannot help believing that this respectable writer was misled in his apprehensions. It ought to be added, that the knowledge in question must, if attained at all, be from the existing state of society in those countries attained with extreme difficulty, and accompanied with not a little uncertainty. This story is also expressly contradicted by Lord Valentia, who has lately travelled in Arabia.

Polygamy is unfriendly to population.

When the world was to be replenished, under an immediate command of God, with human beings, a single pair was chosen to be the means of accomplishing this design.

When the same design was, under the same com-

mand, to be accomplished anew; God chose the three sons of Noah, and their three wives, as the proper means of fulfilling it.

The Turks are polygamists. They possess all the power, almost all the wealth, and therefore almost all the means of subsistence, found in their empire. Yet they are few in number compared with the Greeks, who marry but one wife, and who, subjected to iron bondage under the despotism of these hard masters, are continually impoverished, and plundered of a precarious subsistence, by their rapacious hands.

Polygamy degrades from their proper rank, privileges, and enjoyments, to an almost animal level, one half of the human race. This enormous injustice no consideration can excuse or palliate.

Polygamy has regularly introduced domestic broils of the most bitter kind, terminating in the most fatal manner, and, involving in their deplorable consequences both the parents and the children. Of this truth, complete proofs are found in the few historical accounts which have reached us of the Turkish and Persian royal families.

These considerations, if I mistake not, amply prove, that polygamy is unlawful, and a direct violation of the seventh command.

I shall now proceed to consider the proper subject of the text. This I shall introduce under the following general observation, as directly expressing the principal doctrine in the text;

That divorces, for any other cause except incontinence, are unlawful.

This important scriptural truth I shall endeavour to support by arguments, derived both from Scripture and reason.

From the Scriptures, I allege,

1. *That marriage is a divine institution; and is therefore unalterable by man.*

That marriage is a divine institution, has, I apprehend, been made abundantly evident from various parts of this passage, examined in the Discourse

on the *origin* of marriage. It was there proved, if I mistake not, that God has really joined together every lawfully married pair among the children of Adam. That 'what God hath' thus 'joined' by his infinite authority 'man cannot' lawfully 'put asunder,' needs no illustration. God has made the twain *one*. Man cannot make them twain again, unless with the evident permission of God.

It is to be observed here, that the *translation* exactly expresses the meaning of the *original* in this part of the text: 'Let not man put asunder.' The Greek word is *αὐθρῶπος*, without the article: the most absolute and unlimited expression in that language, to denote *man universally*, without any respect to age, sex, or condition. The prohibition, therefore, is not, that *the husband*, as among the Jews, Greeks, and others; nor that a *judicial tribunal*, as among ourselves; nor that a *legislature*, as in some other communities, may not sunder this union; but that *man, in no condition, place, or time—man possessed of no authority whatever—may sunder this union*, without an express permission from God.

2. I allege as a decisive argument, the guilt which is directly charged by Christ upon all the parties in the divorce, and the consequent marriages.

In the next text Christ declares, that the man who divorces his wife, and marries another, and the man who marries the divorced wife, are both guilty of adultery in this transaction. The same crime, in Matt. v. 32, is charged upon the divorced woman. It will not be questioned, that the woman who marries the divorced husband is guilty in exactly the same manner. Neither of these marriages, therefore, can possibly take place, without involving the crime of adultery in both the married parties. Consequently, a divorce, except for incontinence, is here for ever barred. A divorce professedly sets the parties free, so that they may lawfully marry again. But it is plain from these observations, that they cannot be thus set free, and can never lawfully marry again. Whatever husbands, judges, or legis-

lators may think, or declare, or do, all these parties will by their subsequent marriages become guilty of adultery. Thus Christ has pronounced; and thus he certainly will pronounce at the final day.

It is here to be remarked, that this decision of Christ was totally contrary to the views entertained by his apostles. This they directly declare in the following words; 'If the case of the man be so with his wife it is not good to marry.' Christ, however, does not qualify, nor shorten the decision at all. On the contrary, he leaves it exactly where he had left it before. 'All men,' he replies, 'cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given;' and again, 'He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.'

3. *St. Paul has determined the same point anew; and in the most explicit manner conceivable.*

'Unto the married I command; yet not I, but the Lord; Let not the wife depart,' *χαρισθῆναι*, *be separated*, that is, by a divorce, voluntarily accomplished by herself, 'from her husband;' this being the only command which could be addressed to the wife with any meaning. 'But, and if she depart;' *Εαν δε και χαρισθῇ*; but even if she be separated (that is, by means of a divorce accomplished by him), 'let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband; and let not the husband put away his wife:' *και ανδρα γυναικα μη αφιεναι*, 'and I also command the husband not to put away his wife.' This also is a part of the command given by Christ in the text; and is quoted, not as I apprehend from the text itself, which it is very possible St. Paul at this time may not have seen; but from that immediate revelation which this apostle received of the gospel from the mouth of Christ.

We have here the decision of Christ concerning this subject recited, and declared to be *his* decision by St. Paul, and therefore know the manner in which this command of our Saviour was understood by an inspired commentator. The same precept is here given in all its latitude. A divorce, on both

sides, is absolutely prohibited : and, in case of a divorce, the injured party, the person divorced, is forbidden expressly and absolutely to marry again.

The apostle then goes on, ' But to the rest ; ' that is, to those whose cases were not contemplated by the command of Christ, because they had not existed when that command was given ; ' But to the rest I command, not the Lord. If any brother (that is, a Christian) hath a wife, who is an infidel, and she be well pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away : and, if any woman (that is, any Christian woman) hath a husband, who is an infidel, and he be well pleased to dwell with her, let her not put him away.'

The case here mentioned by the apostle was a new one. While Christ was on earth, there were no Christians who had infidel (that is, heathen) husbands, or wives. For the peculiar circumstances of persons thus situated, Christ had therefore made no direct, explicit provision. Doubts, concerning the proper conduct of such persons, with regard to the duties of the married state, appear evidently to have arisen in the church of Corinth. The great evil felt by these Christians, concerning which they clearly appear to me to have written to St. Paul for his directions, seems to have consisted in these *two things* : the difficulties to which they were subjected by their infidel husbands and wives, with respect to *their attendance on the ordinances of the gospel* ; and their fears, lest their children, having one *infidel* parent, should on account of this fact, *be excluded from the Christian church, and denied the ordinance of baptism*. The latter of these evils the apostle removes, together with the apprehensions of it, in the following verse. ' For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife ; and the unbelieving wife by the husband ; else were your children unclean ; but now are they holy.' That is, the unbelieving party in the marriage-state is, by means of this connexion with the believing party, sanctified, in such a sense, that the children are not put out of the covenant,

but may be offered up to God in baptism.

The former of these difficulties the apostle obviates in the verse, next succeeding. 'But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart.' Εἰ δὲ ἀπίστος χωρίζεται, χωρίζεσθω; If the infidel separate himself, let him separate himself. 'A brother, or a sister, is not in bondage in such things. But God hath called us to peace.' The apostle, it is to be remembered, had no control over the heathen. He says, therefore, 'If the infidel separate himself, let him separate himself.' This is a case over which I have no control, in which you can obtain no relief, and to which you are therefore bound to submit with patience and resignation. But a brother or sister is under no obligation to follow the infidel party, whatever may be thought concerning the extent of the marriage vow; nor to forsake the worship of God, or its ordinances; nor to consent that his or her children should be withdrawn from the privileges of religion. Such a case involves the deepest bondage; and to this bondage no Christian brother or sister is subjected. The verb, here rendered 'is in bondage,' is δεδουλωται; literally rendered, 'hath been reduced to the deepest servitude.' The servitude intended by the apostle is, in my apprehension, unquestionably the submission of a Christian to an infidel husband, or wife, so hostile to the Christian religion, as to refuse to continue in the marriage relation, and perform the duties involved in it, *unless the Christian partner will consent to give up the privileges of the gospel.* This would, indeed, be a deplorable bondage; and deserving of being expressed by the strong term which St. Paul has selected.

Some very respectable commentators, and among them Poole, Doddridge, and Macknight, have, I am aware, supposed this bondage to consist in the obligation under which the Christian party might be imagined to lie, to continue still unmarried. I acknowledge myself surprised at this explanation, and at the reasons by which it is professedly supported. Dr. Macknight, after alleging that this is the apos-

tle's meaning, declares that his decision is just ; ' because there is no reason why the innocent party, through the fault of the guilty party, should be exposed to the danger of committing adultery.'

Poole says, ' Such a person hath broken the bond of marriage ; and Christians are not under bondage by the laws of God, to keep themselves unmarried on account of the perverseness of such parties to the marriage covenant.'

To this opinion, and these reasons, I answer, that *Christ has expressly forbidden the divorced wife, however innocent, to marry again ; and has declared, that, if she does marry, she will be an adulteress.* Certainly, the divorced wife may be, and often is, as innocent as the deserted wife ; and in the nature of the case is as probably innocent. With equal justice, then, may it be said in this case, as in the case of the deserted wife, that ' there is no reason, why the innocent party, through the fault of the guilty party, should be exposed to commit adultery.'

Again : *The divorced wife is more injured than the deserted wife.* She is not only deprived of all the privileges and blessings lost by the deserted wife, but of many more. She is forced by violence from her husband, her children, and her home. She is turned out with disgrace ; as a woman with whom her husband could not continue to live ; and usually with little provision made for her subsistence. The wife who is deserted is, on the contrary, almost always left in the possession of her house, her children, her character, and tolerable means of subsistence for herself and her family. She may be, and most usually is, deserted for reasons involving no disgrace to her. Her husband may have contracted an unwarrantable attachment for another object ; indulged a spirit of roving and adventure ; disgraced himself by his previous conduct ; or fled from some exposure to punishment for some crime, or from creditors, whom he cannot, or will not pay. Accordingly, deserted wives are probably as generally persons of good reputation, as others of their sex. On all these ac-

counts, the case of the divorced wife is incomparably harder than that of the deserted wife. Can it be possible, that Christ has rescued the deserted wife from this deepest bondage, as these writers understand it; and have left the divorced wife, amid so many more and severer hardships, yet equally innocent, to suffer the whole extent of this thralldom?

Mr. Poole says, 'The *deserter* hath broken the bond of marriage, and thus released the deserted party from the laws of God concerning it; so far as they require abstinence from marriage.'

I answer: The *divorcer* has broken this bond *still more violently*; and made the infraction more complete. Of course, he has, according to this scheme in a higher degree made it lawful for the divorced wife to marry again. This reasoning, therefore, equally with that of Dr. Macknight, makes the decision of Christ both unwise and unjust.

Besides, this scheme renders the precept concerning divorce entirely *fruitless*. The man who wishes to divorce his wife is by this scheme entirely released from all the trouble and expense, and generally also from the scandal, usually attendant upon this iniquitous proceeding. He cannot indeed free himself from the sin of deserting his wife, and all those sins which are involved in it. But he may give his wife the opportunity of marrying innocently another husband. When this is done, he himself may, for aught that appears, marry innocently another wife. Thus, by undergoing an absence of three years, the time *here* limited for this object, he may without any peculiar scandal, and without the sin of adultery, accomplish the very object aimed at in cases of this nature by licentious men: *viz.* a second marriage.

St. Paul, in the mean time, has in this very chapter determined the point in question against these commentators. 'Unto the married I command; yet not I, but the Lord; Let not the wife be separated from her husband. But, even if she be separated, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband.' The word, here translated *sepa-*

rated, is the same which is used in the 15th verse; the subject of this inquiry. Is it credible, that an inspired man should at all, or that any man of sober sense should, within the compass of five sentences give two contradictory precepts concerning any subject, especially a subject of this importance? Peculiarly it is incredible, that St. Paul, immediately after reciting a solemn command of Christ, and declaring it to be *his*, should subjoin a contradictory command.

To me it appears equally incredible, that an apostle should designate the situation in which Christ had placed an innocently divorced woman, innocently, I mean, on her part, by the word *δεδουλωται*, and thus style it 'the deepest bondage.' It is, I think, impossible, that the Spirit of God should call any state produced by obedience to the commands of Christ, by the name of *bondage*; and still more evidently impossible, that he should denote it by a name, expressing the most *suffering* and *disgraceful* bondage. How can such an appellation consist with that phraseology, in which the whole situation of Christians is by the same Spirit styled, 'the *glorious liberty* of the sons of God?' If the deserted wife is brought under this bondage, by being denied the liberty of marrying again; the divorced wife is, by the same denial, brought under this bondage in a still more distressing degree. Yet to this situation she is reduced by the express command of Christ.

Finally: St. Paul *himself* has clearly shewn, that this was not his meaning, by the words immediately following the passage in question. 'But God hath called us to peace. For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?' Surely the second marriage contended for cannot ordinarily be the means of 'the peace' here mentioned; that is, peace or concord between the divorced pair. Much more is it improbable, that a husband or a wife, should by means of *second marriages* become instruments of salvation to each other. This

desirable event may be fairly hoped for, if they continue unmarried, from their future reconciliation to each other; but cannot be even remotely hoped for from their divorce, and their consequent final separation.

Should it be said, that *the case of the deserted wife is a hard one*: I acknowledge it. The sins, both of ourselves and others, create none but hard cases. That of the *divorced wife is still harder*. The reason why this law is established is undoubtedly found in *the immense importance of the marriage institution*. It is incomparably better that individuals should suffer, than that an institution, which is the basis of all human good, should be shaken or endangered.

I have dwelt thus minutely on this abused passage, because it is the strong hold of those with whom I am contending. If they cannot find support for their opinions *here*, they can find it nowhere. That they cannot find it here has, I trust, been shewn beyond a reasonable doubt.

What the Scriptures teach us, concerning the subject of divorce, is *abundantly established by reason*. This I shall attempt to evince in the following observations.

It is acknowledged by the advocates for this system, that *the Scriptures do indeed forbid a divorce for any other reason, beside incontinence, or something equivalent*. The things which they consider as equivalent are *obstinate desertion, gross personal abuse, incompatibility of temper, confirmed madness, &c.* I do not intend, that they are all agreed with respect to this class of things; but that some or other of these they actually propose as reasons for divorce equivalent to incontinence.

Concerning this subject I observe,

1. *That there is no such thing as an equivalent in this case.*

No crime, no injury, affects the happiness of wedlock, or wounds so deeply every domestic interest. None so entirely terminates every enjoyment, and every hope, as the crime mentioned by our Saviour

As this is sufficiently evident from the preceding Discourse, it would be useless to spend time in considering it any farther. I shall only observe therefore, that incontinence not only destroys conjugal happiness, and hopes; but annihilates, so far as it extends, the very institution from which they spring.

2. What is at least equally important, *the Scriptures have nowhere mentioned any thing as an equivalent*

It must, I think, be admitted without a question, that, if the Divine Lawgiver had intended that any thing should be considered, in the case in hand, as an equivalent to incontinence, he certainly would have *expressly mentioned* it. Certainly, he must, at least, be supposed to have *hinted* it, or *alluded* to it, in some manner or other. But this he has not done. Unanswerably, then, it was no part of his intentions. It cannot therefore be assumed as such by us. We are here, as well as in other cases, bound absolutely to see, that we 'add not to his words, lest he reprove us, and we be found liars.' I know of no pretence, that there is any thing of this nature found in the Scriptures, except the *desertion*, mentioned in the passage which has been so long the theme of discussion; and this, it is believed, has been clearly shewn to have not even the remotest reference to the subject now under consideration. But,

3. It is urged, that *the evils involved in the things here mentioned as equivalents are intolerable; and demand relief from human jurisprudence.*

To this I answer,

(1.) *That although these evils were much greater than they are in fact; and I acknowledge them to be very great; yet, if God has not thought proper to allow us, and still more if he has forbidden us, to escape from them in the manner proposed, they must be alleged in vain as arguments for divorce.*

The government of his creatures belongs only to God; and nothing but impiety can induce us to interfere with either the modes or the principles of his administration. If he has permitted divorce **on**

either of these grounds, it is lawful. If he has not, however numerous or great may be the evils which we suffer, they will not contribute at all towards rendering it lawful.

(2.) *All these evils may be relieved more perfectly, than by divorce; and as perfectly as human governments can relieve them, by the separation a mensa et thoro.*

In this process the parties, though not released from the bonds of marriage, are separated from each other so far, that the innocent party is no longer bound to live with the guilty. The common property is so disposed of also, as to furnish provision for the wants of both. The children, at the same time, are distributed by public justice in the best manner which the case will admit. Here all the means are furnished which can be furnished for the relief and future safety of the aggrieved party; and incomparably better means than any which divorce can offer.

(3.) *Divorce, instead of remedying, enhances these evils beyond comprehension.*

A law, permitting divorces, except where personal worth and wisdom prevent, produces an immediate separation of interests among all the married persons in a community. With a complete conviction of their liability to divorce for the causes alleged, every married pair begin their connexion. For this event, then, common prudence requires them to make such provision as may be in their power. The wife, the feebler and more dependant party, strongly realizing from the beginning her danger of being left to precarious means of subsistence, at a time always uncertain, and therefore always felt to be near, will be driven by common prudence and powerful necessity to lay up something in store against the evil day. The husband, aware of this state of things from the beginning, will be irresistibly led to oppose it in every part of its progress. This he will do by placing his property, so far as it may be in his power, beyond the reach of his wife; and by contending strenuously for the preservation of the remainder.

A separation of interests is, in all intelligent beings,

necessarily a *separation of affections*. Heaven itself would cease to be a world of love, were its inhabitants no longer to feel a common interest. Oneness of interests makes their oneness of mind, life, and labours. Separate the interests of a married pair, and you separate at once all their affections. Shew them the probability, or even the possibility, of a future divorce ; and you shew them its certainty. From this moment a separation of interests is begun. From this period, however affectionate they may originally have been, their affection will cease. The consciousness, that their interests are opposed, will immediately beget coldness, alienation, jealousy, and, in the end, riveted hatred.

Between persons living together causes of dispute can never fail frequently to arise. Among persons whose interests generally harmonize, and who are governed by principle and moderation, such causes produce little effect. But, between persons in the situation which I have described, they never fail to operate with their fullest efficacy. Their minds are ready to take fire on every occasion, and to construe in the worst manner every real or supposed provocation ; every seeming neglect, every slight word, every unpleasant look. They are dissatisfied with almost every thing that is done, or left undone. A spark will kindle such combustible materials into a flame.

Among persons thus circumstanced, dispositions, naturally kind, soon become unkind ; tempers, before sufficiently compatible, soon become utterly incompatible. Where offices of kindness would have naturally multiplied and flourished, jars are multiplied, bitterness flourishes, disputes are generated, personal violence follows, and, not unnaturally, murder itself. Thus the very evils which divorce professes to relieve it only creates ; and creates them in millions of instances, where it designs to relieve them in one. Thus plain is it, to use the language of Dryden, that

‘ God never made his work for man to mend.’

Were a divorce impossible, the interests of every married pair would be one, through life. This fact would so far unite their affections, as to prevent a great part of the debates of which I have been speaking; and in most cases to terminate the rest without any serious difficulty. Persons who know that their contentions are hopeless, and that, however desirable their separation might seem, it is impossible to effect it, will almost always so far make the best of their circumstances, as to sit down in a tolerable state of content. The absolute union of their interests cannot fail to recur unceasingly to their minds, nor to operate on them with powerful efficacy. Their affection, though occasionally intermitted, will return with its former strength. The necessity which each feels of the other's good offices, will daily be realized. The superior happiness of former harmony will be remembered. Their children also, for whom their cares have been so often kindly mingled, will plead in the most interesting manner for the continuance of their mutual good-will. Thus life, although not without its alternations of disquiet, will in the main go on pleasantly, where, in millions of instances, the knowledge, that divorce was attainable, would have produced discord, hatred, separation, and ruin.

It is well known to every observer of human nature, that a prominent part of this nature is *the love of novelty and variety*, in all its pursuits. In no case is this propensity more predominant, than in the case in hand. Polygamists have endeavoured to satisfy this propensity by replenishing their harems with a multitude of wives. Profligates have attempted to compass the same object by a promiscuous concubinage. The endeavours of both, however, have been equally fruitless. David by this disposition was seduced to adultery. Solomon, in the multiplication of wives and concubines, has shewn, that it knows no limits; and that its effects are nothing but corruption and ruin. By divorce this disposition is let loose; and the spirit of licentiousness has the sign given to roam and ravage without control. The

family, which all the causes of wretchedness already mentioned would not have made unhappy, will be ruined by this cause; a cause sufficiently powerful, and sufficiently malignant, to ruin a world.

To the children, such a state of things is a regular source of absolute destruction. During the contentions of the parents, which will usually be generated by the mere attainableness of a divorce, and which become ultimately the occasion of granting it, the children will either be forgotten, or forced to take sides with the parents. In both cases, their whole education to useful purposes will be neglected. Particularly, they will never be 'trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Jarring parents (and there will be millions of such parents wherever divorce prevails, to one where it does not) can never teach their children religion, either by precept or example. Amid their own irreligious contentions, the farce would be too gross for impudence itself to act, and too ridiculous to be received seriously even by children. They would be left therefore to grow up Atheists, or Nihilists, without religion, without a God, without a hope.

In the *former* case, all their other interests, their support, their comfort, their preparation for business, and their hopes of future usefulness, reputation, and enjoyment, would be neglected. Parents, whose minds were in a continual state of irritation and hostility, could never *unite* in any thing of this nature; and *nothing* of this nature in which they did not unite, would ever be done to any purpose.

In the *latter* case, the children would be taught to join one parent in contending against the other. Here, they would be taught, *some to dishonour their father, and some to dishonour their mother*; in direct opposition to the moral law; and taught by those whom God had appointed to teach them this law. Filial impiety is the most unnatural and monstrous wickedness of which children are ordinarily guilty. We cannot wonder, therefore, that it should conduct them to every other wickedness; that it should end

in impiety to God, or injustice to mankind. The children here are directly taught by one parent to hate and despise the other. Their contentions and calumnies, their mutual scorn and hatred, will force the children to despise both. Children who regard their parents with habitual disrespect, will soon respect neither man, nor God. Devoid of principle, destitute of every good habit, trained up to insubordination and rebellion, and witnesses from their infancy of discord only, malignity, abuse, and slander, they are prepared to be mere villains, nuisances, and pests in the world.

I have all along supposed the parents to continue together until the children have grown up to some degree of maturity and reflection. This, however, would by no means be the common case; and would exist less and less frequently as divorces multiplied. The consequences of an earlier separation, such as would generally take place, would be still more dreadful. *Such of the children as followed the mother*, however affectionate might be her disposition, would share in all the calamities necessarily springing from her unprotected, suffering condition. Women are constitutionally unfitted to encounter the rude, toilsome, and discouraging scenes every where presented by this unkind, untoward world, and allotted by the Creator only to the robust hardihood of man. A divorced female is almost necessarily an outcast. Her children, who follow her fortunes, must be outcasts also. Defenceless herself, she cannot defend *them*. Unable to support herself, she will be still more unable to support *them*. Even the spirit of moderation will regard her as unworthy and disgraced. The common feelings of the world will mark her as the mere butt of scorn and infamy. Why was she divorced? 'Because she was unfit to sustain the character of a wife,' will be the answer, every where hissed out by the tongue of contempt. In all this contempt, and in all the evils which this wolfish spirit draws in its train, the children will necessarily share; and will be regarded

like the spurious offspring of beggars, born under a hedge, and buried in a ditch.

Such of them as survived their multiplied sufferings, and these would be comparatively few, would be solitary, deserted beings without a home, without a father, without education, without industry, without employment, without comforts, and without hopes; residing nowhere, and related to nobody. Like the wild men, said to be found at times in the forests of Germany and Poland, and supposed to be nursed by bears, they would sustain the character of mere animals. At war with every thing, and by every thing warred upon; when out of sight, forgotten; and when seen, regarded only with horror; they would live without a friend, without a name, nay, sunk beneath the cattle wandering in the same deserts, without a mark, to denote to whom they belonged. Thus they would prowl through life, and putrefy on the spot where they were seized by death.

Nor would the children *who followed the father*, in most instances, be at all more comfortable. The cold-hearted cruelty of *step-mothers* is proverbial. Palpable injustice has, I doubt not, been extensively done by the unkind opinions of the public to persons of this denomination. I have myself known multitudes of persons fill this station with great integrity, tenderness, and excellence. Yet, even in this enlightened, refined, and Christianized country, I believe there are few mothers who leave the world while their families are young, without very serious anxieties concerning the treatment which their children will receive from their future step-mothers. This, and every thing else dreaded or complained of, with respect to the class of persons in question, exists in the midst of a community made up of parents married according to the laws of God. Their families also live in the midst of civilization, gentleness of manners, and the mild influence of religion, where the whole tide of things flows favourably to humanity, justice, kindness, and all the interests of the unprotected

Far different would be the situation of children under this superintendence, in regions where divorce prevailed. The father, having released himself from one wife, and married another, would soon forsake the second for a third; this for a fourth; this for a fifth; and thus onward, without any known limit. A French soldier lately declared before a judicial tribunal in Paris, that he had married eleven wives in eleven years; and boasted of this fact as honourable and meritorious. The scandal would soon vanish; and mere convenience, whim, or passion control the conduct. What then would become of those children of the first wife, who fell under the management of such a succession of step-mothers; absolute strangers to their family, their interests, and even their legitimacy; their mothers only for a year, a month, or a day; mothers, before whom they would only pass in review, rather than with whom they would live; mothers, distracted in their affections, if they had any; certainly in their thoughts, cares, and labours, distributed to so many children of so many sorts, having so many interests, and distracted themselves by so many contentions? Who does not see with a glance, that, even where humanity and principle reigned, these friendless beings would soon be neglected by the step-mother in favour of her own offspring? What must be their fate, where lewdness had succeeded to principle, and humanity had already been frozen out of the heart. Soon, very soon, must they become mere and miserable outcasts; like those who wandered away from their father's house with their divorced mother.

Divorces, once authorized, would soon become numerous, and in most countries would, in a moderate period of time, control the whole state of society. Even in this State, where the tide of manners and morals is entirely against them, and where for somewhat more than a century they have blackened the public character with a strange and solitary but dreadful spot, they were indeed for a long time rare. The deformity of the object was so great, the

prevalence of vital religion was so general, and the power of conscience and of public opinion so efficacious, that few, very few comparatively, had sufficient hardihood to apply. The law also allowed of less latitude to applications. At the present time the progress of this evil is alarming and terrible. In this town,* within five years more than fifty divorces have been granted; at an average calculation, more than four hundred in the whole State during this period: that is, one out of every hundred married pairs. What a flaming proof is here of the baleful influence of this corruption on a people, otherwise remarkably distinguished for their intelligence, morals, and religion! Happily, a strenuous opposition is begun to this anti-scriptural law, which, it may be fairly hoped, will soon terminate in its final revocation.

• In France, within three months after the law permitting divorces was enacted by the National Assembly, there were in the city of Paris almost as many divorces registered as marriages. In the whole kingdom there were, as reported by the Abbè Gregoire, chairman of a committee of the National Assembly on that subject, upwards of twenty thousand divorces registered within about a year and a half. 'This law,' added the Abbè, 'will soon ruin the whole nation.'

From these facts, as well as from the nature of the case, it is clearly evident, that the progress of divorce, though different in different countries, will in all be dreadful beyond conception. Within a moderate period, the whole community will be thrown, by laws made in open opposition to the laws of God, into a general prostitution. No difference exists between this prostitution, and that which customarily bears the name, except that the one is licensed, the other is unlicensed, by man. To the eye of God, those who are polluted in each of these modes are alike, and equally impure, loathsome, and abandoned.

* New Haven.

wretches ; the offspring of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are, divorced and undivorced, adulterers and adulteresses ; of whom the Spirit of truth has said, that not one of them ‘ shall enter into the kingdom of God.’ Over such a country, a virtuous man, if such a one be found, will search in vain to find a virtuous wife. Wherever he wanders, nothing will meet his eye but stalking, bare-faced pollution. The realm around him has become one vast brothel ; one great province of the world of perdition. To that dreadful world the only passage out of it directly leads ; and all its inhabitants, thronging this broad and crooked way, hasten with one consent to that ‘ blackness of darkness,’ which envelops it for ever.

SERMON CXXII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT.

IDLENESS—PRODIGALITY.

Thou shalt not steal.—EXOD. XX. 15.

THE preceding command prohibits all trespasses against purity ; this against property.

To steal, is to *take privately* the property of others, with an intention to convert it to our own use. To rob, is to take the same property, for the same purpose *openly*, and with violence. There can be little necessity of expatiating upon a crime so well understood and so universally infamous, as stealing, before an assembly whose education, principles, and habits furnish so strong a barrier against it. It may, however, be useful to observe, that this crime has its origin in that spirit of covetousness which prompts us to wish inordinately for the enjoyments and possessions of others. This spirit when indulged, continually acquires strength ; and in many instances, becomes ultimately so powerful, as to break over every bound of right and reputation. The object in

contemplation is seen to be desirable. As we continue to contemplate it, it becomes more and more desirable. While the attention of the mind is fixed upon it, it will be turned, comparatively, very little to other objects; particularly to those moral restraints which hinder us from acquiring what we thus covet. The importance and obligation of these restraints gradually fade from before the eye. The man, engaged only in the business of obtaining the intended gratification, naturally finds little leisure or inclination to dwell upon the danger, shame, or sin, of seizing on his neighbour's possessions. Thus he becomes unhappily prepared to put forth a bold and rash hand, and to pluck the tempting enjoyment, in spite of the awful prohibitions of his Maker. He who does not covet will never steal. He who indulges covetousness, will find himself in danger wherever there is a temptation.

In examining this precept, it will be my principal design to consider the subject of *fraud*.

That fraud is implicitly forbidden in this precept will not, I suppose, be questioned. The Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of Divines explains the command in this manner; 'It requires,' say they, 'the lawful procuring and furthering, the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others;' and 'forbids whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour's wealth, or outward estate.'

In the Catechism of King Edward it is thus explained: 'It commandeth us to beguile no man; to occupy no unlawful wares; to envy no man his wealth; and to think nothing profitable, that either is not just, or differeth from right and honesty.' In this manner we are abundantly warranted to understand it by our Saviour's commentary on the other commands, in his sermon on the mount. Accordingly, it has been generally understood in the same comprehensive manner by divines. To this interpretation the nature of the subject gives the fullest warrant. *All that which is sinful in theft is the taking of our neighbour's property, without his knowledge or con-*

sent, and converting it to our own use. In every fraud we do exactly the same thing, although in a different manner. Every fraud therefore, whatever be the form in which it is practised, partakes of the very same sinful nature which is found in theft.

Fraud is in all instances a violation of what is commonly called *honesty*, or *commutative justice*. *Honesty*, in the scriptural sense, is a *disposition to render*, or the *actual rendering* of an *equivalent* for what we receive, in our dealings with others. This equivalent may consist either of *property* or of *services*; honesty being equally concerned with both. At the same time, there is such a thing as *defrauding one's self*. 'Whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own outward estate,' or in other words, *that comfort and benefit which we might derive from our property, or from our opportunities of acquiring it*, is of this nature; and is accordingly forbidden by this commandment.

With these introductory observations, I shall now proceed to consider the prohibition in the text under the following heads:—

I. *The fraudulent conduct which respects ourselves and our families.*

II. *That which respects others.*

I. I shall mention several kinds of fraudulent conduct which most immediately respect ourselves and our families.

All the members of a family have a common interest; and are so intimately united in every domestic concern, that, 'if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.' Whatever affects the head must affect the whole body. If a man defraud himself, either directly or indirectly, he cannot fail therefore of defrauding his family. For this reason I have thought it proper to consider *the family* of a man as united with *himself* in this part of my subject.

The first specimen of fraud which I shall mention under this head, is *idleness*.

That idleness hinders our own wealth or outward

estate, will not be questioned. 'I went by the field of the slothful,' says Solomon, 'and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo! it was all grown over with thorns; and nettles had covered the face thereof; and the stone-wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.'

Idleness at the same time, is obviously a fraud. The lazy man cheats himself of good which God hath given to him; of enjoyments put into his hands by the bounty of his Creator. These blessings he barter for the love of ease. The price which he pays is very great; that which he gets in return is 'dross and dung.'

The mischiefs of idleness are numerous and important.

1. *Idleness is a sinful waste of our time.*

Our time is a possession of inestimable value. The best employment of it, that is, such an employment of it as the Scriptures require, involves all which is meant by our duty. The loss or waste of it is therefore no other than the loss or omission of all our duty; the frustration of the purpose for which we were created.

2. *Idleness is a sinful waste of our talents.*

By these I mean all the powers of body and mind, and the means which God has furnished us in his providence of employing them for valuable ends. Our time and talents united, constitute our whole capacity of being useful, our worth, our all. The idle man wastes them both; 'wraps them up in a napkin, and buries them in the earth.' In this manner he robs God of the end for which he was made, and becomes a burden upon the shoulders of his fellow-men. He eats what others provide; and while *they* are industriously engaged in labour, *his* business is only to devour. Thus he is carried by mankind as a load, from the cradle to the grave; is despised,

loathed, and execrated, while he lives ; and when he dies, is buried like the carcase of an animal, to fulfil the demands of decency, and merely to get rid of a nuisance.

In the mean time, ' his drowsiness clothes' himself and his family ' with rags ;' prevents them from the enjoyments common to all around them ; disappoints, without a reason perceivable by them, all their just expectations ; and, as was formerly observed concerning the drunkenness of a parent, sinks them below the common level of mankind. Want in every form, and all the miseries of want, arrest them daily, and through life. Their food is poor and scanty ; their clothes are rags ; they are pinched with cold, through the destitution of fuel ; and deprived of refreshing sleep, because their bed is the earth, and because their dwelling, a mere sieve, admits without obstruction snow and rain, the frost and the storm. Thus, while they see almost all others around them possessed in abundance, not of the necessaries only, but of all the comforts, and most of the conveniences of life ; they themselves are forced to look on, and thirst, and pine, for the tempting enjoyments ; while, like Tantalus, they are forbidden by an iron-handed necessity to taste the good.

At the same time, the man is forced to feel, while his family also are compelled by him to feel, that, he, their husband and their father, is the subject of supreme folly and insignificance, and of gross, unremitted, and hopeless sin ; of folly, which is causeless ; insignificance, voluntarily assumed ; sin, unnecessary and wanton ; and that he is an object of general and extreme contempt. The contempt, directed immediately to him, is of course extended to his family also ; and they are compelled, at their first entrance into the world to encounter the eye of scorn, and the tongue of derision. All these evils are sustained, also, only that the man may lead the life of a sluggard, be assimilated to the sloth in his character, and rival the swine in his favourite mode of life, and his most coveted enjoyments.

3. *Idleness exposes a man to many temptations, and many sins.*

A lazy man is, of course, without any useful engagement: his mind is therefore vacant, and ready for the admission of any sin which seeks admission. To such a man temptations may be said to be always welcome. They are guests, for which he is regularly prepared; and he has neither company nor business to hinder him from yielding to them, whatever attention or entertainment they may demand. The proverbial adage, that 'Satan will employ him, who does not find employment for himself,' is founded in experience and good sense. The mind even of the idlest man will be busy; and the mind which is not busied in its duty, will be busied in sin. On such a mind every temptation is secure of a powerful influence; entices without opposition, and conquers without even a struggle, or a sigh. Hence we find such a man devoted, not only to the general sin of idleness, but to all the other sins which he can conveniently practise.

'The sluggard,' says Solomon, is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.' From this miserable vanity, of which their deplorable mismanagement of their own affairs ought to cure them at a glance, it arises, that sluggards so commonly become *the professed counsellors of mankind*. Hence it arises, that so many of them are *politicians, pettifoggers, and separatist preachers*. They know nothing, it is true, except what an abecedarian knows, of either *divinity, law, or government*. Still they feel and declare themselves to be abundantly able to teach the way to heaven, which they have never learned; and to explain laws, which they never studied. The affairs of a nation, so numerous, so complicated, and so extensive, as to be comprehended only by minds peculiarly capacious, and to demand the laborious study of a life, these men understand instinctively; without inquiry, information, or thought. Their own affairs, it is true, they manage in such a manner as to conduct them only to ruin. Yet they

feel perfectly competent to manage the affairs of a nation with pre-eminent skill, and certain success. Every thing in the concerns of the public, if you will believe them, goes wrong; and will never be set right, if you will believe them a little farther, by any body but themselves. These men are 'smoke to the eyes, and vinegar to the teeth,' of persons possessing real understanding. To the public they are mere nuisances, living on the earnings of others; fomentors of discontent, active agents in riots and broils, incendiaries, who consume the peace and comfort of all around them, and who well deserve to be 'the by-word and the hissing' of every upright and benevolent citizen. Such were the men whom the Jews of Thessalonica gathered into a company against Paul; who 'set all the city in an uproar;' and attempted to destroy the apostle and his religion by the violence of a mob. They were *αγοραῖοι*; translated 'lewd fellows of the baser sort;' literally, 'idle, lounging haunters of market-places.'

It ought particularly to be remembered, that *persons of this character rarely become converts to Christianity.* Among all those who within my knowledge have appeared to become sincerely penitent and reformed, I recollect only a single lazy man; and this man became industrious from the moment of his apparent, and, I doubt not, real conversion. The sinful prostitution of his time and talents by idleness, and his ready admission of temptations to his heart, fix the idler in a regular hostility against all the promises and threatenings of religion; while his self-conceit makes him too wise willingly to receive wisdom even from God. Few cases in human life are, in this respect, more desperate than that of the idler. A preacher destined to address an assembly of such men might, with nearly the same hope of success, exchange his desk for the churchyard, and waste his eloquence upon the tenants of the grave.

In the mean time, every lazy man ought steadily to remember, that *his very subsistence is founded on fraud.* 'If any man will not work,' saith the Pro-

prietor of all things, 'neither let him eat. For him to eat is to rob; to rob his Maker of *his* property, and his fellow-men of *theirs*.

2. *Prodigality is another fraud, of the same general nature.*

There are various modes of prodigality. Property may be wasted by negligence, by foolish bargains, by the injudicious management of business, by bold adventures, and by direct profusion. The guilt in the different cases may vary somewhat. The general nature of the conduct, its folly, and its end, are substantially the same. There will, therefore, be no necessity of distinguishing it here with any particular attention.

The effects of prodigality are, in many respects, exactly the same with those of idleness. By both these vices property is effectually wasted. The negligent waster of property is influenced by the same motives which govern the idler; and shuns the labour of *preserving* it, as the idler the labour of *acquiring* it, from the mere love of ease. The spendthrift squanders it, for a foolish fondness for the several enjoyments of which he makes it the price; from the love of show, the indulgence of whim, and the relish for luxurious and voluptuous gratification. The objects of his expense are, either in their degree or their kind, always unnecessary to his true interest, and his real comfort. Passions which ought not to be indulged, whims which ought not to exist, much less to be cherished, govern his mind with despotic sway and make him their absolute and miserable slave. Unsatisfied with what he is, and what he has, he pines incessantly with a sickly taste for some new gratification; for objects in which he supposes happiness to lie, and in which he expects to satisfy a relish, too restless, craving, and capricious ever to be satisfied. His appetite is canine; not merely eating and drinking, but devouring; and, although daily crammed, is still hungry.

Vanity and pride are also perpetual prompters to the prodigal; vanity, which cries with an unceasing

voice, 'Give, give;' pride, which never saith, 'It is enough.' Goaded by these passions, he struggles with unceasing anxiety to outrun those around him in the splendour of dress, equipage, houses, gardens, and other objects of expense. The contest of one with many is almost necessarily unequal. It is scarcely possible, that some of his competitors should not excel him in one thing, and some in another; or that, whenever he is excelled, he should not be unhappy. In its nature, the strife is unwise and fruitless; because neither the spirit nor the efforts of rivalry ever made any man happy. In its progress, it necessarily disappoints all his eager wishes and fond hopes. When he succeeds, the expected enjoyment expires in the very moment of success; when he fails, the disappointment makes him miserable. With all this, he is preparing himself insensibly for more accumulated misery. No prodigal ever looks into his affairs, nor conjectures the extent of his expenses. Of course, no prodigal ever perceives the rapidity with which his property declines. To men of this sort ruin is always nearer than they mistrust and hastens with a celerity of which they never dreamed. While the means of expense are supposed to last, the whole host of sharpers fasten on him as their prey. The jockey cheats him in a bargain. The swindler borrows and runs away with his money. The usurer furnishes him with loans at an enormous interest. Heedless of expense, and greedy of the enjoyments which it procures, every manufacturer of frippery, every owner of a toy-shop, selects him as his own best customer, and exchanges the merchandise of Vanity-fair for his money and his lands.

Such a career providence never suffers to last long. Unsuspected by himself, but foreseen by all around him, ruin, hastening with rapid steps, knocks at his door in an evil hour. The host of wretches who pamper themselves on his extravagance while they secretly laugh at his folly, startled at the sound, are out of sight in a moment. They have indeed rioted at his expense, and might be, expected to be grate-

ful for what he has given. But gratitude is rarely created by profusion, and the hearts of such men were never susceptible of gratitude. They have feasted on enjoyments which he furnished; but they came only to feast, not to sympathize. They have encouraged his expence, praised his generosity, admired his taste, and professed a deep interest in his happiness. But their whole business terminated in enjoying, praising, admiring, and professing. They are harpies, who gathered round him to revel on his profusion; the sycophants who flattered him, that they might be admitted to the revel. For him, for any other human being, they never exercised a generous thought, a sympathizing feeling, an honest good-will. The house of suffering has no charms, for *them*. They came only to get; and when they can get no longer, they come no more.

When they have taken their flight, instead of being grateful to him for the enjoyments on which they have so long and so riotously feasted at his expense, they are among the first, most incessant, and most clamorous of those who load him with censure. Instead of pitying his calamities, calamities into which they have persuaded, urged, and flattered him; they make both him and them the butt of ridicule, a mark for scorn to shoot at; and persuade the world to forget that they have been eminently the causes of his destruction, by vociferating their contempt of his folly.

In the mean time, his door is thronged by a mob of duns, and a host of bailiffs. His houses and lands pass away to the sharpers, who have been long fattening upon his spoils. His equipage, his furniture, even the very bed on which he has slept, is struck off to the highest bidder. The sprightly sound of the viol and the harpsichord is succeeded by the hammer of the auctioneer. Broken in fortune, and broken in heart, the miserable squanderer and his miserable family quit their luxurious mansion, and shelter themselves in a solitary hovel.

This wretched career is rendered more sinful, and

more unhappy, by the avarice which regularly haunts the prodigal. Addison, in a beautiful allegory, informs us, that luxury and avarice were formerly at war; that, after various vicissitudes of fortune, they agreed at length to a permanent peace, on the condition that luxury should dismiss plenty from his service, and avarice, poverty, their ministers of state; and that avarice should become the minister of luxury, and luxury of avarice, by turns. Since that period, he informs us, luxury ministers to avarice, and avarice to luxury. Every prodigal is, in intention at least, a luxurious man. Every prodigal almost is avaricious. He grasps at money eagerly, that he may find the means of continuing his darling profusion; and covets with as craving an appetite, that he may spend; as the miser, that he may hoard. Like the miserable sufferers described by Isaiah, he 'will not spare even his own brother;' but 'will snatch on the right hand, and still be hungry; and devour on the left, and will not be satisfied.'

Equally exposed is he to the sin of fraud, as perpetrated upon his fellow-men. Peculiarly is he of the number of those 'wicked who borrow and never pay.' No man is more lavish of promises, notes, and bonds; and no man more stinted in discharging his honest debts. The farmer, mechanic, and manufacturer, are peculiarly the objects of his fraud. The debts which he pays at all, are those which he is pleased to style debts of honour, the debts of luxury; debts contracted to furnish the means of splendour and voluptuousness. The necessities of life are objects too humble to be ranked in the list of his enjoyments. Insignificant in themselves, that is, as he estimates them, they are not felt to be deserving of his attention. Those who furnish them also are too modest and too quiet to compel his regard. Those who gratify the demands of show and pleasure are, in his view, persons of higher consequence; and are usually too clamorous and too persevering in their demands, to suffer them to be turned away by a mere succession of empty promises. Their

claims are of course first satisfied. Not the *rich* but the *poor* and the *hungry*, are here 'sent away empty.'

The same necessity which drives him to promise-breaking urges him also into its twin vice of lying. He wants money daily; and as the ordinary means of obtaining it fail; he resorts to every art, and fetch, and falsehood, to supply his pressing necessities. A true account of his circumstances and designs would prevent every supply. To falsehood, therefore, and to trick he betakes himself, as the most obvious means of relieving his immediate wants. In this manner he becomes, within a moderate period, a common cheat, and a common liar.

Nor is the prodigal much less in danger from drunkenness. The peculiar distress which attends the consciousness of embarrassed affairs, made up of the strong pressure of wants without the means of relieving them, a continual apprehension of approaching ruin, united with an insurmountable reluctance to make any efforts towards preventing it, edged and pointed by a succession of duns, mortified pride vanishing pleasures, and clamorous appetites; this peculiar distress is a powerful and frequent cause of habitual intoxication. The unhappy being who is the subject of such distress, instinctively haunts, but haunts in vain, for relief, and even for consolation. Despair meets him at every corner. Often the only alleviation which presents itself to his afflicted eye, is the terrible resort to the transient stupefaction of strong drink. Thus the forlorn wretch, with a varied, indeed but always downward course, makes his situation worse and worse; and hurries himself to final ruin by the very means on which he fastens for relief.

Nor is the prodigal in small danger of becoming a suicide. He has lived for a length of time in the gratification of pride, the enjoyment of conscious superiority, and an uninterrupted course of voluptuous indulgence. When the dreams of greatness are over, and the riot of pleasure has ceased, the

change to want and degradation is often too sudden, and almost always too great, to be borne with equanimity. In the earlier moments of desperation, it is not uncommon to see the prodigal betake himself, for refuge from the load of humiliation and despair, to poison, the pistol, or the halter. *Among those who become suicides in the possession of their reason, a more numerous list is nowhere found, than that which is composed of ruined prodigals.* Few men have sufficient fortitude to sustain, without shrinking, the excruciating evils to which persons of this description regularly hurry themselves; excruciating, I mean, to *such men.* We do indeed, meet at times, beings who, like disturbed ghosts, haunt places of public resort; and labour to keep in the remembrance of mankind the shadows, shreds, and tatters of their former gaiety and splendour; and serve as way-marks to warn the traveller of his approach to a quagmire, or a precipice. But far more commonly they shrink from the public eye, and from the neglect and contempt which they are conscious of having merited; and not unfrequently hide themselves for ever from the sight, by hurrying into the future world!

The prodigal is also *dreadfully exposed to hardness of heart.* Should he continue to live, should he become neither a suicide nor a drunkard, still the love of expense and pleasure, grown by indulgence into an obstinate habit, the long continued forgetfulness of God, the total negligence of religion and all its duties, the entire absorption in the present, and the absolute disregard of the future, universally attendant on this mode of life, naturally render the heart callous to every divine impression. A man who thus eagerly forgets God, ought certainly to expect that God will forget him. For, no man says to the Almighty more frequently, or more uniformly, 'Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways. From the house of God, from the Scriptures, nay even from prayer, the last hope of miserable man, he voluntarily cuts himself off. What prospects must he then form concerning his future being!

The family of the prodigal share necessarily in most of his calamities, and almost necessarily in many of his sins. A great part of the same temptations arrest them, of course. A great part of the sins are provided for them, and regularly served up. Should they escape from moral ruin, the event would be little short of a miracle, unless it should be accomplished by an early and timely failure of the means of sin. The sufferings to which they are exposed are numberless. The prodigal, fascinated by show and pleasure, cannot attend to the education of his children. He cannot spare from his own enjoyments, in his view indispensable, the means of education abroad; particularly an education at all suited to their original circumstances, the expectations which he has forced them to form, and the wishes which they have reasonably as well as naturally cherished. Religious instruction, admonition, and reproof, a prodigal never can give. He who does not pray for himself, cannot be expected to pray for his family. The parent who does not frequent the house of God, will soon see it forsaken by his children. Thus the education of his children will be deserted by the prodigal. The invaluable season of childhood and youth will be lost, and those early impressions, both economical and religious, those important habits, on which the good of this life, and of the life to come, is in a great measure founded, are never established in their minds.

To their comfortable settlement, whatever may be his wishes, he has voluntarily lost the power to contribute. Before the period arrives at which this important object is to be accomplished, his wife (if she has not died of a broken heart) and her children usually see him a beggar; and follow him to his hovel, which has become his only shelter. Hence, if they survive the ruin of their hopes, the children are soon turned into the world, to make their way through all the thorns and briers which regularly embarrass the path of persons in such a situation. The hand which feeds the young when they

er y, does, indeed, usually feed *them*. Earthly friends, at times also, they may find; and sometimes may be regarded by strangers with compassion and tenderness, which they never experienced from him who gave them birth.

REMARKS.

1. *By these considerations, parents are taught the incalculable importance of educating their children to industry and economy.*

Revolve for a moment the miserable character, circumstances, and end of those who have been the subjects of this Discourse. Who would be willing, who would not shudder at the thought, that such would be the character, such the circumstances, and such the end, of his own children? How shall this dreadful catastrophe be prevented? Under God, only by a faithful education of children to industry and economy; by habituation to some useful, active business; or some diligent, sedentary employment; by thorough instructions, and a persuasive example. These are the fountains of sustenance to human life. A fortune bequeathed to children, or provided for them at an earlier period, instead of being a secure provision for their future wants, is commonly a mere incitement to ruin; a bounty given to idleness; a watch-word to begin the career of profusion.

The Jews are said, during some periods at least of their existence as a people, to have educated their children universally in active business; and to have adopted proverbially this aphorism, 'He, who does not bring up his child to useful industry, brings him up to be a beggar and a nuisance.' It is to be fervently wished, that all Christian parents would adopt the same maxim, and thus prepare their children to become blessings both to themselves and mankind. It has been repeatedly observed in these Discourses, that industry and economy are not natural to man, and can only be established by habituation. These habits must both be begun in the morning of life, or there is danger that they will never be begun suc-

cessfully. As no man, consistently with his plain duty, can be excused from being industrious and economical himself, so no man can be justified for a moment, who does not effectually communicate both industry and economy to his children. He who at the first made labour the employment of mankind, and who afterward commanded to 'gather up the fragments, that nothing might be lost;' will admit no excuse for the neglect of these duties, whether they respect ourselves, or our offspring. In this subject, parents and children of both sexes are equally concerned. Both parents are bound to teach their children; and their children, of both sexes, are bound to learn to be industrious, and to be economical; to fill up their time with useful employments; to methodize it, that it may be thus filled up; and to feel that the loss of time, the neglect of talents, and the waste of property, are all serious violations of their duty to God. The parents are bound to inspire, and the children to imbibe, a contempt, an abhorrence, for that silly, worthless frivolity, to which so many children, of fashionable parents especially, are trained; that sinful waste of the golden hours of life, that sickly devotion to amusement, that shameful, pitiable dependance on trifling, to help them along, even tolerably, through their present tedious, dragging existence. Few persons are more to be pitied, as certainly few are more to be blamed, than those who find their enjoyment only in diversions; and cling to a ride, a dance, a visit, a play, or a novel, to keep them from sinking into gloom and despondence. Industrious persons who spend their time in useful pursuits, are the only persons whose minds are serene, contented, and cheerful. If we wish happiness for our children, then, we shall carefully educate them to an industrious life.

Let no parent, at the same time, forget what alarming temptations and what gross sins surround idleness and profusion. This consideration will, if any thing will, compel parents to educate their chil-

dren in this manner. The parent's fortune is here of no significance. The heir of a fortune is far more exposed to all these evils than he who has none. If he is to go through life with a fortune, he is to be taught to earn and to preserve property. Without this instruction, he will probably, ere long, be beggared, tempted without any defence to multiplied sins, and become a liar, a cheat, a drunkard, and perhaps a suicide. What parent would not tremble at the thought, that his own negligence would entail these evils upon his offspring?

2. *Young persons, whatever may have been their education, are here forcibly taught to pursue an industrious and economical life.*

The children of wealthy parents are generally prone to believe that they are destined, not to usefulness, but to enjoyment; and that they may be idle therefore without a crime. No opinion is more groundless, and very few are more fatal. God made all mankind to be useful. This character he requires of them without conditions. He who does not assume it, will be found inexcusable at the final day. Every human ear ought to tingle, and every heart to shudder, at the doom of the unprofitable servant in the gospel.

Still more prone are youths to believe, that profusion is honourable, and to shrink from the imputation of niggardly conduct. There is no more absolute absurdity than the supposition, that prodigality and generosity are the same thing. They are not even allied. Generosity consists in giving freely, when a valuable purpose demands it; and with a disposition benevolently inclined to promote that purpose. Prodigality is the squandering of property, not for valuable, but base and contemptible purposes; for the mere gratification of voluptuousness, vanity, and pride. All these gratifications are mean selfish, and despicable. The generous man feels the value of property. The prodigal has no sense of this value. The generous man gives, because what he gives will do real good to the recipient; the prodigal

gal, because he cares nothing about property, except as it enables him to acquire reputation, to gratify his pride, to make an ostentatious display of wealth, or to outstrip and mortify a rival. In all this there is not an approach towards generosity. On the contrary, the motives are grovelling and contemptible; and the manner in which they are exhibited to the eye is disingenuous and hypocritical; a gaudy dress upon a loathsome skeleton. But the prodigal fails of the very reward which he proposes as the chief object of his expense. In spite of all his wishes and efforts, even weak men perceive that he is totally destitute of generosity; and those who most flatter, are the first to forsake him; while, to shelter their own meanness and treachery, they proclaim, more loudly than any others, his weakness, faults, and miseries to mankind.

Let every youth then fasten his eye on this wretched character, this pernicious conduct, and this deplorable end. His own exposure let him strongly feel. Let him realize with solemn emotions of mind, that idleness and profusion are broad and beaten roads to ruin, both in this world and that which is to come. With these views, let him devote all his time to some useful and upright employment; and thus make every day yield its blessings. What he acquires by commendable industry, let him faithfully preserve by prudent, watchful care. In this manner he will become honourable in the sight of wise and good men, a blessing to himself, to his family, and to mankind; while he will, at the same time, fulfil one important end of his being.

SERMON CXXIII.

THE LAW OF GOD, THE DECALOGUE.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT. FRAUD.

Thou shalt not steal.—EXOD. XX. 15.

HAVING considered the *frauds* which men practise upon themselves, and their families, I shall now proceed to examine the

II. Head of discourse, proposed at that time ; viz. *The frauds which we practise upon others.*

Of these, the first class which I shall mention is, *those which respect borrowing the property of others.*

Frauds of this kind are so numerous, that it is impossible here to mention them all ; and so common, that most persons practise them, without even suspecting themselves to be criminal. Still they are frauds, and crimes which admit of no excuse.

Of this transgression persons are guilty, *whenever they suffer that which has been loaned to them, to be injured through their own negligence.* This evil is extremely common ; and by a great part of mankind is scarcely regarded, unless when the injury is considerable, as being censurable at all. Still it is obviously a violation of confidence ; a falsification of the terms upon which the loan was given and received. No man ever lent any thing of any value with an agreement on his part, that it should be injured unnecessarily by the borrower. No man ever received a loan with a profession on his part, that he expected to injure the thing lent, unless in cases where the nature of the transaction obviously involved the injury, and a consequent compensation. This, it will be observed, is a case properly arranged under the head of *bargains*, and not of *loans*. Persons are guilty of this kind of fraud also, *when they return, instead of a consumable or perishable article*

which they have borrowed, what is of inferior value. We often borrow those things which perish in the use. In this case, not a small number of individuals satisfy their consciences, if they return the same thing in kind and quantity, although plainly inferior in its value. A scrupulous spirit of integrity would induce us rather to return somewhat more in value than we have received, that we may make due satisfaction for the property loaned, and for the particular convenience which it has furnished us.

Another fraud of the same nature is practised, *whenever we unreasonably detain in our possession whatever has been loaned to us.* Most persons probably are in a greater or less degree chargeable with this fault. A want of punctuality in this respect is a serious evil, extending very far, and often intruding not a little upon the peace and comfort of good neighbourhood. But there are persons who go through life, borrowing without thinking of returning that which they borrow; and who thus doubly tax the good nature of those around them. This conduct is totally contrary to good faith, and to plain justice. Every borrower, in his application for every loan is understood, and knows that he is understood, by the lender to engage, not only to return that which he borrows, but to return it within a reasonable time. It is unjust and unkind to retain the property of the lender beyond his consent, to use it beyond his permission, and thus to reward his kindness with injury.

Of a similar fraud are we guilty, *when we employ that which is lent for purposes and in modes not contemplated by the lender.* Multitudes of mankind are guilty of this crime, and in ways almost innumerable. All our right to the use of the loan, not only as to the fact, but also as to the manner and the degree, is derived solely from the consent of the owner. To that which he has not given, we have not, and cannot have, any right. We are bound therefore scrupulously to use what we borrow within the limits of his permission. When we transgress these limits

we obviously violate the plain dictates of common justice, and are therefore inexcusable.

There is, perhaps, no fraud of which youths sent abroad for their education are so frequently guilty, or to which they are so strongly solicited by temptation, as one strongly resembling this, which I have described. They are, of course, intrusted by their parents with property, necessary, or supposed to be necessary, to defray the expenses of their education. Every parent has his own views concerning the manner in which this property is to be expended. This manner the parent usually prescribes to his child, and has an absolute right to prescribe it. The *property* is his own; the *child* is his own. Both the manner, therefore, and the expense, of the child's education he has an absolute right to control. The parent's prescription then the child cannot escape without fraud, nor can he violate it without filial impiety.

When such a youth expends the property intrusted to him by his parents in any manner, or to any degree, beyond his parent's choice, so far as that choice is made known to him, he is guilty of fraud, and violates the command which I am discussing. Nay, if he is reasonably satisfied concerning what his parent's choice *would be*, although it has not been explicitly declared, he is bound scrupulously to regard it in all his conduct; and to expend no more, and for no other purposes, than those which are involved in his parent's pleasure. Nor can he, consistently with his plain duty, pursue different objects, and conduct himself in a different manner from what his parent has prescribed, without being guilty of similar fraud.

The parent may not indeed, and probably will not, often punish his child for these transgressions. Often he may quietly acquiesce in the wrong. Still the conduct is not the less sinful, nor the child the less guilty. Human tribunals fail of punishing many crimes; but they do not for this reason cease to be crimes. If a child would avoid sin, if he would in

this respect be blameless in the sight of God, he must direct all his expenses, and regulate all his conduct conscientiously, according to the will and prescription of his parents. To this end, he must limit his wants to the allowed measure of his expenses ; and act scrupulously, as he would act if his parents were continually present.

2. *Another species of frauds is practised in what is called trespassing on the property of others.*

Frauds of this nature are very numerous, and greatly diversified. Many persons, without being sensible of doing any injustice, walk through the enclosures of others, and tread down their grass, grain, and other valuable productions of their labour. Others leave open the entrances to their enclosures and thus expose the fruits of the earth to damage, and often to destruction. Others still plunder their gardens, orchards, and fields, of such fruits particularly as are delicious. Others plunder their forests of wood, both for their own consumption and for the market. Both these acts are, however, falsely called *trespasses*. No actions of man are more obviously *thefts*, in the full sense. Accordingly, they are spoken of in the language of common sense and common custom, only under the name of stealing. Others suffer their cattle, accustomed to break through enclosures, to go at large in their own fields ; and thus, in reality, turn them into the fields of their neighbours. To dwell no longer on this part of the subject, multitudes habitually neglect to repair their own walls and fences ; and in this manner leave a continual passage for their cattle into the fields of their neighbours.

A very different set of trespasses (I do not mean in the legal sense ; for I know not what name law would give them), and undertaken with very different views, is found in the operations of that spirit of *vulgar mischief*, which, through envy, or some other base passion, cherishes a contemptible hostility against the improvement and beauty of building, fencing, and planting, formed by its prosperous neighbours. This spirit

prompts the unworthy minds in which it dwells, to mar and deface handsome buildings and fences; to root up, or cut down, trees and shrubs planted for shade and for ornament. This spirit is no other than that of *the dog in the manger*. It will neither enjoy the good itself, nor suffer any others to enjoy it. One would think that, in the view of such minds, beauty and elegance were public nuisances; and that to have contributed to adorn one's country with the delightful productions of nature and art is a trespass upon the common good.

Another class of frauds, possessing the same nature, is seen in most places, at least in this country, *in the abuses of public property*. Public buildings are almost every where injured and defaced; the windows are broken; the doors, wainscoting, pillars, and other appurtenances formed of wood, are shamefully carved, and hacked; the courts, balustrades, and other vulnerable articles, are mangled and destroyed. In a word, injuries of this nature are endless; and all of them are scandalous frauds, useless to the perpetrators, wounding to every man of integrity and taste, discouragements to public improvement, and sources of public deformity and disgrace.

Another class of these frauds is denoted by the general name, *peculation*.

It will be useless to me to dwell on what nations have so long and so loudly complained of—the plunder of the public by statesmen, commissioners, and contractors; men, who appear to feel a prescriptive right to fatten themselves on the spoils of the community. There are, I fear, but few men, comparatively, who feel themselves bound to deal with *the public*, or with any *body* of their fellow-men, agreeably to the same strict and equitable principles which most persons acknowledge to be indispensable in dealing with *individuals*. For services rendered to public bodies almost all men demand a greater reward than they would dare to claim from *individuals*. For commodities sold to them they

charge a higher price. In settling accounts with them, they claim greater allowances; and in every transaction plainly intend to get more than custom and equity have permitted in the private business of mankind. The single article of *perquisites* is a gulf of voracity, which has no bottom. The only rule by which this undefined class of demands seems to be controlled, is to claim whatever the person indebted can be expected to give.

The common doctrine among all the claimants to whom I have referred, appears to be, that *there is no wrong in demanding more of public bodies for the same service, or the same commodity, than of individuals, because public bodies are more able to pay.* Justice, on the contrary, affixes the same value to the same thing. This value will be affixed by every honest man; and will be his only rule of compensation for his commodities or his labours, whoever may be the purchaser, or the employer.

In every one of the cases which I have specified, the persons concerned defraud their fellow-men of their property, and cheat themselves out of their duty and their salvation. But they cannot cheat their Maker. The all-searching eye surveys, with a terrible inspection, these workers of iniquity; and at the final day, will be found to have traced every secret winding, every snaky path, every false pretence, and every flattering self-justification of fraud. At that awful period, how many persons will be found to be cheats, who, in this world, sustained the characters of fair dealers, and were regarded by all around them as honest men.

3. *Another class of frauds is attendant upon bargains.*

These, like the former classes, are very numerous; and are varied continually by the circumstances of the bargain, and the ingenuity, negligence, and dishonesty of the parties.

An honest bargain is that, and that only, in which an equivalent is given, and received; in which, the value of the commodities in each case being supposed to be known, the fair market price is mutually allowed.

The market price is, in all ordinary circumstances, the equitable price; and wherever it is known, will be cheerfully paid by an honest man. Where it cannot be known, such men will settle their contracts as equitably as they can; each designing faithfully to render an equivalent for what he receives. Every bargain not formed on these principles is unjust; and, if thus formed intentionally, is dishonest. But how different from these are the principles upon which bargains are very extensively made in this country, and but too probably in others also.

Among the innumerable frauds practised in this vast field of human business, I shall specify the following:—

Multitudes of persons when forming bargains, misrepresent or conceal the state of the markets. Most men profess to be willing to be governed in their dealings by the market price. But great numbers of these very men intend to buy for less, and sell for more. Hence they carefully conceal this price from those with whom they deal; and thus buy at diminished, and sell at enhanced prices. This conduct is plain dishonesty; and would not deceive even the subject of it, were he not blinded by his own avarice. He perfectly knows that his neighbour would not buy nor sell on these terms, except from his ignorance; and that the advantage which he gains, is gained only from his neighbour's misapprehension of the commodities in question. Can an honest man take this advantage? Would any man of reputation justify himself in taking it of a child? Why not of a child, as well as of a man? Because, it will be answered, the child knows not the worth of what he buys, or sells. Neither, in the case specified, does the man. Would he who takes this advantage be willing that his neighbour should take it of him? The answer to this question needs not to be given. It is plain, then, that the conduct referred to is unjust and fraudulent.

There are many other persons who directly misre-

present the market price. These men feel satisfied, if they do not palpably lie; if, for example, they report what this price has lately been; what they have heard somebody declare it to be; or what price has been given by an individual, who has sold at a high, or bought at a low price; both, very different from the general one. All these are mere fetches, used by a dishonest mind to deceive itself, and to defraud others.

Another palpable fraud of this class is *the use of false weights and measures.* These are often used when they are *known*, and often when they are *suspected*, to be false; and more frequently still when they are *suffered to become defective through inattention.* In this, the man is apt to feel himself excused, because he is not intentionally fraudulent: not remembering, that, whenever it is in his power, God has required him to *do justly*, and not merely *not to design to do unjustly.* He has given him no permission to sin through negligence. Weights and measures are often formed of such materials as to ensure decay and diminution. Whenever this is known to be the case, the proprietor is unpardonable, if he does not by frequent examinations prevent the injustice. The wrong he cannot but foresee; and the remedy is always and entirely in his power. If we love justice as we ought, we shall take all those measures which are necessary to accomplish it. He who is resolved to 'do to others what he would that others should do to him,' will never suffer it to remain undone for want of exertions, which demand so little self-denial.

Whenever a man begins to do wrong through negligence, he will soon do it through design. Indifference to sin is the next step to the love of it. The only safety in this case, and all others of the like nature, is to 'resist the *beginnings* of evil.' If our opposition to it be not begun here, it will never be begun. Every smaller transgression prepares the way for a greater. Every gross villain has become such by small beginnings. 'No man,' says the Latin proverb, 'becomes abandoned at once.' He who begins to backslide without compunction, will find his remain-

ing course only downward; and will descend with continually increasing velocity to the bottom.

Another prominent iniquity of this class is selling commodities which are unsound and defective, under direct professions that they are sound and good. This is sometimes done with palpable lying, sometimes with indefinite and hypocritical insinuations. Agents, and men who buy to sell again, often assert their wares to be good, because those of whom they received them have declared them to be good. These declarations are often believed, because the agent professes, or at least appears, to believe them; while, in truth, he does not give them the least credit.

One of the grossest impositions of this nature is practised upon the public in advertising and selling nostrums as safe and valuable medicines. These are ushered into newspapers with a long train of pompous declarations, almost always false, and always delusive. The silly purchaser buys and uses the medicine, chiefly or only because it is sold by a respectable man, and under the sanction of a splendid advertisement, to which that respectable man lends his countenance. Were such men to decline this unfortunate and indefensible employment, the medicines would probably fall into absolute discredit; and health, and limbs, and life would in many instances be preserved from unnecessary destruction.

Another specimen of similar fraud is practised in concealing the defects of what we sell. This is the general art and villany of that class of men, who are customarily styled jockeys; a class unhappily comprehending multitudes who would receive the appellation with astonishment and disdain. The common subterfuge of these men is this, that 'they give no false accounts concerning their commodities; that the purchaser has eyes of his own, and must judge for himself.' No defence can be more lame and wretched; and scarcely any more impudent. A great proportion of vendibles are subject to defects which no purchaser can descry. Every purchaser is therefore obliged to depend on the seller for information

concerning them. All this the seller perfectly knows; and, if he be an honest man, will certainly give the information to the purchaser; because in the same situation he would wish it to be given to himself. At the same time, no purchaser would buy these articles if he knew their defects, unless at a diminished price. The actual purchaser is therefore, in colloquial language, *taken in*; and taken in by palpable villany.

Another specimen of the same nature is furnished by the practice of *depreciating the value of such commodities as we wish to buy*. 'It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he hath gone his way, he boasteth.' Such was the conduct of men in the days of Solomon. We have ample proof that human nature now, is not in this respect altered for the better. The ignorant, the modest, and the necessitous, persons who should be the last to suffer from fraud, are in this way often made its victims. A decisive tone and confident air, in men better dressed, and supposed to know better than themselves, easily bear down persons so circumstanced, and persuade them to sell their commodities for less than they are plainly worth. The purchaser, in the mean time, as soon as they are out of hearing, boasts of his gainful bargain; and trumpets, without a blush, the value of the articles which he had before decried.

4. *Another class of frauds is connected with the contraction and payment of debts.*

The first transgression of this nature which I shall mention, is, *the contraction of debts, with clear conviction, that we possess no means of discharging them; and that we shall, in all probability, possess no such means hereafter; at least, within any reasonable period of payment.*

Multitudes of persons covet enjoyments in the possession of others, to such a degree, that they are willing to acquire them, if they can, without troubling themselves about paying for them. Such persons are often professed cheats, and triumph in the success of their impositions. But there are others, who regard themselves as honest men, and would be not a little

surprised, as well as wounded, at the suspicion of fraudulent designs in their conduct. Most or all of these men form some loose, indefinite design of paying their debts; but, instead of providing the necessary means for this purpose, trust to some future casualty. They will tell the creditor who charges them with dishonest conduct, that, although they did indeed know themselves to be destitute of property, and of any rational expectations of future property when the debt was contracted, yet they hoped that in the course of events they should, in some manner or other, become able to discharge it. In this case, they will add, they should have discharged it, both willingly and faithfully. What they thus allege is, probably, in many instances true. The persons in question do not form a direct intention to defraud their creditors. Thus far their honesty goes. But here it stops. They form no design, direct or indirect, to take effectual measures to do their creditors justice. They do not conscientiously abstain from contracting debts until they know that they shall be able to cancel them by fair payment. On the contrary, they contract them when they know themselves to be unable, and to be unpossessed of any fair probable means of being able at a future time. In all this they are, although often without suspecting it, grossly dishonest.

Another sin, very nearly akin to this, is *contracting debts, without perceiving any means of payment to be in our power*. Those who transgress in this manner feel satisfied if they do not know themselves to be unable to pay. Were they evangelically honest, they would take effectual care to see whether they were able, or not. Often, by overrating their property, their efforts, or the markets, they feel a loose conviction, that they shall possess this power; but take no pains to render the fact certain, or even probable. Such morality can result only from absolute insensibility of mind to the great duty of doing justly, an entire ignorance of what it demands, and a total forgetfulness of exposure to the Divine indignation. We are bound, before we

receive, before we become willing to receive, our neighbour's property, to know that we have means clearly probable of paying him; otherwise, we wantonly subject him to the loss of it; and differ very little, as moral beings, from thieves and robbers. If we are in doubt concerning either the probability or the sufficiency of these means, it is our duty to detail them fairly to the person with whom we are dealing. If, in this case, he is disposed to intrust us with his property, and we afterward make faithful efforts to cancel the debt, I do not see, that we are chargeable with fraud, although we should fail. He who contracts a debt, without discerning that he has probable means of discharging it, differs in no material respect from a swindler. He plunders his neighbour from indifference to justice; the swindler from contempt of it. In the view of common sense, in the sight of God, the moral character of both is essentially the same.

Another transgression, of the same general nature, is *neglecting to pay our debts at the time*. There are many persons, whose general character, as honest men, is fair; who yet, in this respect, are extremely deserving of censure. They contract debts, which they engage to discharge within a given time. This time is therefore a part of the contract; a ground on which the bargain is made; a condition, on which the price was calculated. This obvious truth is understood by all men, and makes a part of the language of every bargain in which credit is given. To the expectation formed by the creditor of receiving his debt at the time specified, the debtor has voluntarily given birth. It is an expectation therefore which he is bound to fulfil. If he does not take every lawful measure in his power, to enable himself to fulfil it, or if he does not fulfil it when it is in his power, he is guilty of fraud; of depriving his neighbour, not perhaps of design, but by a guilty negligence, of a part of his property.

The delay of payment beyond the appointed time is in almost all instances injurious, and in some al

most as injurious to the creditor, as an absolute refusal to pay would originally have been. The real value of a debt, where the security is sufficient, is among men of business estimated according to the time when the payment is reasonably expected. Thus notes, bonds, and other obligations for money when given by men known to be punctual in the discharge of their debts, pass in the market for their nominal value; and are received in payments with no other discount than that which arises from the distance of the period when they become due. Those given by negligent men are, on the contrary, considered as depreciated from the beginning; and that, exactly in proportion to the negligence of the signer. Of this sum, be it what it may, the negligent man defrauds his creditor.

The law of God required, in accordance with the doctrine which I am urging, that the sun should not be suffered to go down upon the hire of the labourer. The spirit of punctuality here enjoined ought to be found in all men. The engagements which we make, we are bound, as honest men, to fulfil. The expectations which we knowingly excite in the minds of those with whom we deal, we are required to satisfy; and when we fail, either voluntarily or negligently, we are inexcusable.

The last iniquity of this species which I shall mention is *the payment of debts with something of less value than that which we possess.*

It has been doubtless observed, that I have, all along throughout this Discourse, chiefly passed over in silence those gross frauds which are the direct objects of criminal prosecution. Such is my intention here. I shall pass by the gross iniquities of passing counterfeit currency; forging obligations and endorsements, and others of the like nature. To reprove these crimes cannot be necessary in this place. I have therefore confined, and shall still confine myself to those which are esteemed smaller transgressions, and are less observed, and less dreaded by mankind.

There are some kinds of currency, whose *real* value is inferior to that which is *nominal*. Coin is in some countries, and at some times, alloyed below the common standard. It is also very often worn down below the standard weight. Paper currency is also in many instances subjected to a discount, wherever its true value is understood. Debts are very often paid with this depreciated currency, without any notice given by the debtor of its depreciation.

Debts are paid also to a considerable extent in commodities. In these there are often defects, in kind or quantity, not readily perceivable by the creditor, and, what is much more unhappy, concealed, or not disclosed, by the debtor.

Often debts are paid by labour and services. These, not unfrequently, are stinted with respect to the time through which the labour ought to extend; the skill, and thorough execution which ought to be employed; the care which ought to be used; and, universally, the completeness of the service engaged, and therefore justly expected by the creditor. In every case of this nature, it is the design of the debtor to gain something by the means and mode of paying the debt, which he would not have gained, had he paid it in undebased coin; and which he would not have gained by a fair, honest fulfilment of the original terms of the contract. Whenever the debtor feels that in discharging his debts he has acquired something from the creditor, not involved in the plain terms of the contract, he may be assured, that his mode of payment has involved in it a fraud and that he has acted the part of a cheat.

All these may, and often do, seem to the perpetrators crimes of little moment; and it will, perhaps, be no easy matter to convince them of the contrary. I wish such persons to remember the great maxim, taught by the unvarying experience of man—that he who allows himself to be dishonest in one thing, will soon be dishonest in all things. I wish them still more solemnly to remember, that God is a witness of all their fraudulent conduct, however it

may be concealed from mankind ; and that, although they may cheat men, they cannot cheat God.

5. *Another enormous class of frauds is composed of breaches of trust.*

Upon this unlimited subject my observations must be few, and summary. Frauds of this kind are found in the servant and the monarch, and in all the intervening classes of mankind. They fill with complaints every mouth, and haunt every human concern. To describe them would demand the contents of a library ; to name them would be to recount most of the business of man. As they exist every where, so all men are familiarized to them. Of course, it is the less necessary to detail them here. There is also but one opinion concerning them, and concerning their authors. They are all by a universal voice pronounced to be frauds ; and their authors to be knaves and villains.

He who assumes an employment, engages in the very assumption to discharge the duties which it obviously involves. If he fails, he fails of his duty ; if he negligently or voluntarily fails, he is palpably a dishonest man. The expectations which we knowingly excite in others, we are indispensably bound to fulfil. Nothing less than this will satisfy the commands of God, or the dictates of an unwarped conscience. Nothing less will ever acquire or secure a fair reputation. I shall only add, that there is no easy or sure method of accomplishing this invaluable object, but to begin early, and to go on with inflexible perseverance.

REMARKS.

1. *The subject which has been under consideration presents us with a very humiliating and painful specimen of human corruption.*

The duty of rendering justice to our neighbour, is one of the plainest dictates of the law written on the hearts of men, one of the first demands of conscience, one of the prime injunctions of God. Accordingly, no duty has been more readily, universally, or abso-

lutely acknowledged or demanded by mankind. The bounds also which separate justice from injustice, are often defined with mathematical exactness, almost always clearly known, and rarely capable of being mistaken. Yet in how many ways, forms, and varieties is this duty violated! By how many individuals! Of how many classes! Who, however wise, honourable, or excellent, however revered, or beloved, is not at times the victim of fraud, and the dupe of cunning! The known instances are innumerable. What endless multitudes are probably unknown, except by the omniscient eye! How great a part of human time and talents has been employed only in fraud! One hundred and twenty thousand persons, in the city of London alone, are declared by the judicious Colquhoun to derive the whole, or the chief part, of their subsistence from fraudulent practices. Here, villany of this nature has become a science; and is pursued, not merely without remorse, but with system; with a coolness, which laughs at morality; an ingenuity, which baffles detection; an industry, which would do honour to virtue; and a success, which overwhelms the mind with amazement. All these things exist in the capital of that country, which has been more distinguished than any other for knowledge, morality, and religion.

But London is not alone concerned in this iniquity. It prevails wherever rights are claimed, or property exists. In our own country, so young, and distinguished beyond most others for the moral character of its inhabitants, it prevails in a manner which ought to cover us with shame and sorrow. Frauds of all the kinds which have been mentioned are not only practised, but avowed. Nay, many of them have ceased to wear the name of frauds. Oppressive bargains are customarily styled by those who make them, *good bargains*; and boasted of as specimens of ingenuity, skill, and success. Debts, in multiplied instances, are contracted without honesty, and witholden by mere fraud. Even the set-

element of estates furnishes often gross exhibitions of oppression and cheating, and the widow and the fatherless are made a prey. Why is this done? Because the deceased is gone, and cannot detect the iniquity: because those whom he has left behind are without defence, and without remedy.

A great part of the business of legislators is the prevention of fraud. To detect and punish it is the chief employment of judicial tribunals. How immense have been the labours of both; and to how vast an extent have they laboured in vain!

How frequently do we ourselves see character, safety, and the soul, all hazarded for a pittance of gain, contemptible in itself; and of no consequence to him who cheats his neighbour, and sells himself, to acquire it! With what unceasing toil, and under what hard bondage, does the miser wear and waste his life, to filch from those around him little gleanings of property, merely to bury it in his chest, and without daring to use it for himself or his family! How frequently do swindlers and gamblers, like the troubled ghosts of antiquity, haunt places of public resort; and stare in open day, and in circles of decent men, until the hour of darkness arrives, when they may again, like their kindred vampyres, satiate themselves upon rottenness and corruption!

How often is war made, how often are oceans of blood spilt, lives destroyed in millions, and immense portions of human happiness extinguished, merely to plunder others of their property!

To all these evils, instruction, example, laws, punishments, conscience, the word of God, and the prospect of damnation, oppose their force and terror in vain. Prudence and policy contend against it with as little success. All nations have pronounced honesty to be more profitable than any other conduct. Poverty on the one hand, and infamy on the other, have ever threatened the intentional knave with a whip of scorpions. Still, he walks onward coolly and steadily, unmoved either by the remonstrances of earth and heaven, or the dangers of hell.

2. *These observations shew the vast importance of fixing in our own minds, and in the minds of our children, the strongest sense, and the most vigorous habits of exact, evangelical integrity.*

He who wishes to live well here, and to be happy hereafter, must in all his intentional dealings ask, as an all-controlling question, What is right? and make all things bend to the answer. 'Fiat justitia ruat cœlum!' ought to be the governing maxim of private as well as public life. Of all virtues, justice and truth are the first in order, the first in importance. To them every thing ought to give way. If they are permitted to rule, man cannot fail to be virtuous, amiable, and happy.

But every moral truth, and every moral precept, is of more consequence to children, and may be made of more use to them, than it can be to others. Good seed, sown in the spring-time of life, cannot ordinarily fail to produce a harvest; which will be vainly expected, if it be sown in the autumn. The parent who values the comfort, character, or salvation of his child, will impress on his young and tender mind, in the most affecting manner possible, the incalculable excellence and importance of integrity, and the inestimable worth of an unblemished character, and an unsullied life. At this hopeful period, the parent should inweave into the mind of his child, as a part of his constitutional thinking, a strong conviction, that property itself, according to the usual dispensations of God, is to be acquired only by uprightness of conduct; and that fraud is the highway to beggary, as well as to shame. Peace of conscience, he should be taught from the first, can never dwell in the same soul with injustice, and without peace of conscience, he should know, the soul will be poor and miserable. Habitually should he remember, that the eye of God looks alway upon the heart; and that every dishonest design, word, and act is recorded in that book, out of which he will be judged at the great day. Finally, he should learn the unvarving fact, that one fraud

generates another of course ; and that thus the dishonest man corrupts unceasingly his heart and his life, and is seen by all around him to be ‘ a vessel of wrath,’ daily ‘ fitting for destruction.’ All these instructions example should enforce and sanction ; and on them all prayer should invoke its efficacious blessings.

3. *These observations teach us now greatly such as are customarily styled moral men deceive themselves.*

Multitudes of men who sustain this character censure preachers for dwelling so frequently on *the doctrines* of the gospel, and for not introducing oftener its *moral precepts* into their sermons. These persons regard themselves as being moral in the proper sense, and wish preachers to inculcate just such morality as they themselves practise. They pay their debts, and wish other men to pay theirs, keep true accounts, sell at the market prices, make as good bargains as they can, and get as much money as they can in this manner. These are the things which they wish preachers to inculcate.

Such persons are yet to learn that the morality of the gospel is wonderfully different from all this. It includes whatever I have said in this and the preceding Discourses concerning the law of God, whatever I shall say in the succeeding ones, and more than I have said, or can say, in both. The morality of the gospel begins in an honest and good heart, disposed to render always and exactly to our neighbour the things that are our neighbour's, and to God the things that are God's. It knows not, it disdains, it abominates, the tricks, the fetches, the disguises, the concealments, the enhancements, the delays of payment, the depreciated payments, the base gains, and the double-minded character, always found in the coarse-spun morality of this world. Worldly morality aims supremely and only at being *rich* ; evangelical morality at doing that which is *right*. Every person satisfied with worldly morality who hears this sermon, will probably go away from it displeased with what he will call its rigidity,

and discontented to find that what he has been accustomed to think his own stronghold furnishes him with so little either of safety or comfort. But let him remember that, whether he is pleased or displeased, no morality short of this will answer the demands of the law of God.

SERMON CXXIV.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT. GAMING.

Thou shalt not steal.—EXOD. XX. 15

THE frauds, practised by men upon *themselves*, and their *families*; and a variety of other frauds perpetrated by mankind upon *each other*, have occupied the two preceding Discourses.

I shall now proceed to the consideration of another fraud of this latter class; viz. *gaming*.

Multitudes of persons professedly believe gaming to be innocent; and accordingly labour not a little to justify it to others. As they aim to clear it from all imputations of criminality, it will be both proper and necessary to consider the subject generally, that its advocates may perceive, that it is not only fraudulent, but sinful in many other respects.

The observations, which I shall make on this subject, will be arranged under the following heads:—

I. *The evils of gaming which immediately respect others.*

II. *Those which immediately respect ourselves.*

Among the evils which respect *others*, I observe,

1. *That gaming is in all instances fraud.*

By *gaming* here, I intend that only, by which property is *won or lost*; and this property, by which party so ever acquired, I assert to be acquired invariably by fraud.

There are but *two* possible methods, by which we can acquire property from others *honestly*; viz. either *by free gift*; or *by rendering an equivalent* for what we receive. I need not say, that property won by gaming is not obtained in either of these ways. That which is acquired neither is, nor is intended to be, given: and, instead of an equivalent, the gamester renders nothing for what he has received.

God, in the decalogue, has absolutely bound us 'not to covet any thing which is our neighbour's.' This sin of coveting every gamester is guilty of, when he sits down to win the property of his neighbour. Of this truth he gives unanswerable evidence in many ways. To win the property in question, is the only motive for which he spends his hours at the card-table, and the dice-box. At the same time, he sees his companion afflicted, suffering, and even ruined, by the loss of his property, without restoring, or thinking of restoring, to him any part of what he has lost. Did he not covet this property, the most vulgar humanity would induce him to relieve distresses, the relief of which would demand only the sacrifice of what he did not wish to retain. Instead of this, however, we always find him speak of his winnings, when valuable, with self-gratulation and triumph, and plainly considering them as acquisitions of no small importance to his own happiness. The gamester, therefore, sinfully covets the property of his neighbour. The design to obtain it without rendering an equivalent, is in its nature fraudulent, and will be admitted into his mind by no honest man. But this design every gamester cherishes; and in the indulgence and execution of it spends the principal part of his life. His life is therefore an almost uninterrupted course of fraud. To render this career complete, the gamester spends a great part of his time in contrivances and labours to get, and in actually getting, the property of others for nothing. This is the very crime of the cheat, the swindler, and the thief. If the thief when he stole, the cheat when he bargained, and the swindler when he borrowed his

neighbour's property, voluntarily left an equivalent, how obvious is it, that his crime, though I acknowledge he might even then be in some degree criminal would hardly be mentioned, and scarcely regarded as an immorality. The main turpitude in every one of these cases is plainly the desiring and the taking of our neighbour's property without an equivalent. But this turpitude is entirely chargeable to the gamester.

It may, however, be said, that all the other persons mentioned take the property in question *covertly*; while the gamester takes it *openly*, and therefore, fairly. So, I answer, does the robber.

It will be farther said, that these persons take the property *without* the consent of the owner; whereas the gamester wins it only *with* his consent. As I suppose this to be the stronghold of all who advocate the lawfulness of gaming, it will be proper to consider it with some attention.

In the first place, then, *this consent is never given in the manner professedly alleged by those who defend the practice.*

No man ever sat down to a game, with an entire consent that his antagonist should win his property. I speak of those cases only in which the property staked is considered as of some serious importance. Every person who is a party in a game of this nature, intends to win the property of his antagonist, and not to lose his own. His own he stakes only because the stake is absolutely necessary to enable him to win that of his antagonist. Thus, instead of consenting to lose his own property, each of the parties intends merely to obtain that of his neighbour for nothing. This is the only real design of both; and this design is as unjust, and as fraudulent, as any which respects property can be. That such is the only real design, the loser proves, in the clearest manner, by deeply lamenting his loss; and the winner, in a manner little less clear, by exulting in his gain.

Secondly: *Each of the parties expects only to win, either by superior skill, or superior good fortune.*

No man ever heard of a gamester, who sat down

to play with a decided expectation of losing.

Thirdly: *No man has a right to yield his property to another on this condition.*

The property of every man is given to him by his Creator, as to a steward, to be employed only in useful purposes. In such purposes he is indispensably bound to employ it. Every other mode of employing it is inexcusable. This doctrine I presume the gamester himself will not seriously question. The man must be lost to decency and to common sense, who can for a moment believe that his Creator has given any blessing to mankind for any purposes except those which are useful; or that himself, and every one of his fellow-men, are not unconditionally required by God to promote useful purposes with all the means in their power; and with their property, equally with other means, at all times. But it will not be pretended that staking property on the issue of a game, is an employment of that property to any purpose which God will pronounce to be useful. In *his* sight, therefore, no man can lawfully employ his property in this manner. Of course both parties in thus staking their money are guilty of sin; while each also invites and seduces the other to sin.

Fourthly: *Every man is plainly bound to devote his property to that purpose which, all things considered, appears to be the best of those which are within his reach.*

By this I do not mean that which is best in the abstract, but best for *him*, in the sphere of action allotted to him by his Maker. In other words, every man is bound to do with his property, as well as his other talents, the most good in his power. I am well aware that this subject cannot be mathematically estimated; that in many cases the mind of a wise and good man may be at a loss to determine, and that the determination must be left to personal discretion. But, in the present case, there can be neither difficulty, nor doubt. No man will pretend that losing his money to a gamester, is disposing of it in such a manner as to promote the best purpose in his power. If he needs it himself, it will be more

useful to him to keep it still in his possession. If he does not need it, it will be incomparably better to give it to those who do. To impart it thus to a gamester, always a vicious man, often a profligate, and always a squanderer, a man known to employ his money for sinful purposes only, can never be useful, nor even vindicable, in any sense. The proof of this is complete. No man ever thought of making a gamester, *as such*, an object of alms-giving. To other prodigals, to idlers, and even to drunkards, alms at times are given. But the most enlarged charity never dreamed of finding a proper object of its bounty in a gamester. To stake money in this manner, therefore, is so far from employing it in the best manner which is in the owner's power, that it is employing it in a manner indefensible, and in every respect sinful.

From these considerations it is plain, that this argument in favour of gaming, cannot avail to the purpose for which it is adduced. On the contrary, it only contributes to exhibit the sinfulness of gaming in a new light.

It oftens happens, and almost always in the beginning of this practice, that the gamesters are youths; and that the property which they stake belongs to their parents. This property is never intrusted to children for the purpose of gaming. They receive, and their parents communicate it for some valuable end, in which the promotion of their comfort and welfare was concerned. In receiving it, the children engaged, either expressly or implicitly, to use it for this end. In staking it, therefore, at the gaming-table, the child is guilty of a gross breach of good faith, and literally robs his parents of their property. And 'he,' says Solomon, 'who robbeth his father, or his mother, and saith it is no sin, is the fit companion of a murderer.'*

2. *The gamester ruins multitudes of his fellow-men, and injures deeply multitudes more.*

* Prov. xxviii. 24. (Hodgson.)

By this I intend, that he plunders them of their property, and reduces them to beggary. The whole history of gaming is a mere record of this ruin. It is also completely evinced by daily observation. The bankruptcies continually brought upon mankind in this manner are innumerable; particularly upon the young, the ignorant, the thoughtless, and the giddy. He who can coolly sit down to the ruin, or even to the serious injury of one of his fellow-men, is an arrant villain, equally destitute of common good-will, and common honesty.

3. *The gamester corrupts others by his example, and thus entails upon them moral ruin.*

'One sinner,' saith the wise man, 'destroyeth much good.' In no manner is this terrible mischief accomplished so extensively and so effectually as by an evil example. Gamesters are always wicked men, totally destitute of principle, and sunk far below the common level of corruption. To this degree of turpitude, every gamester reduces all those who become his companions. The ruin here accomplished is infinitely more dreadful than that mentioned under the preceding head. It is the endless ruin of the soul; the destruction of every enjoyment, and every hope. All other injuries compared with it are 'nothing, and less than nothing.' With the guilt of accomplishing this stupendous evil, the gamester is wholly chargeable, and for this guilt he will be compelled to answer at the final day. What sober man, nay, what profligate, would not tremble at the thought of assuming this responsibility? But the gamester coolly and quietly makes himself answerable, not for the ruin of one soul, but of multitudes.

4. *The gamester ruins his family.*

The gamester voluntarily and causelessly exposes himself to beggary. In this conduct he sets afloat, without any security, and against every rational hope, the property on which his wife and children are to be supported, and by which his children are to be educated, and settled for life. Almost every gamester is ruined by play. By this disaster, both the

comforts and the hopes of his family are destroyed, their spirits are broken and lost, and all their efforts to gain character and subsistence prevented. But if any man provide not for his own, especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.' What then shall be said of the man who squanders in this useless and guilty manner all that himself or his ancestors have provided? To the mere lust of gaming he sacrifices the property on which his family might subsist with comfort and reputation, by which they might be educated to usefulness and honour, and by which they might be settled advantageously in life. To this lust therefore he sacrifices their subsistence, their hopes, their all.

In the mean time, he performs few or none of the great duties of a parent. He does not instruct; he does not govern; he cannot reprove; he cannot pray *with* his children; he cannot pray *for* them!

His example is only pernicious. He keeps the worst hours, frequents the worst places, attaches himself to the worst company; and thus, taking his children by the hand, conducts them to the same certain means of destruction.

His character, therefore, contemptible and odious in itself, must be seen by them to be contemptible. Instead of the privilege and blessing always enjoyed in beholding a worthy, and pious, and venerable father, they suffer the deplorable calamity of seeing him who stands in this affecting relation, a curse to themselves, and a nuisance to mankind.

II. *I shall now consider those evils of gaming, which immediately respect themselves.*

These evils are very numerous, as well as very important. The first which I shall mention, is, that *It is a waste of time.*

The only light in which gaming is commonly regarded as justifiable is that of *amusement*. Amusements mankind certainly need; and what they need is lawful. But gaming is not rendered lawful by this consideration.

Every lawful amusement is of such a nature as to refresh and invigorate either the body or the mind. But gaming does neither. That it does not refresh the body is too obvious to demand either proof, or assertion. Equally certain is it, that it does not refresh or invigorate the mind. It furnishes no valuable information; it adds no strength to the reasoning powers. So far as it has influence at all, it wearies the intellectual faculties, and is attended with all the fatigue, but with no part of the benefit, which is experienced in severe study.

It neither sweetens nor enlivens the temper. On the contrary, it is a grave, dull, spiritless employment, at which almost all persons lose their cheerfulness, and impair their native sweetness of disposition; in which the temper is soured; and in which gloom and moroseness, and frequently envy and malice, are not only created, but strengthened into immoveable habits. Gamesters, I know, herd together. But it is without good-will, or social feelings, and merely because gaming makes it necessary. Their minds are engrossed, but not invigorated. Their time is ardently and anxiously, but not cheerfully, employed. They flock to the gaming-table, just as the hermit and the thief return to their respective employments, because habit has made these employments necessary to them; although the hermit, if he would make the experiment, would be happier in society; and the thief, as an honest man.

All the real pleasure found in gaming, except that which arises from the love of sin, is found in the acquisition of money, or the pride of victory, and the superior skill, or the fortunate chance, from which it is derived. All these are base and sordid sources of pleasure. Gaming, then, is not a useful, and of course not a justifiable amusement.

In the mean while, all the time employed in it is wasted and lost. This loss is immense. No man can answer for it to his Maker; no man can repair the injury which is done to himself. It cannot be too often said, nor too strongly realized, that time is

the most valuable of all things ; since on the proper employment of it depends every blessing which we are capable of receiving. He who wastes it, as every gamester does, is guilty of a prodigality which cannot be estimated. All men are bound by the most solemn obligations to 'redeem their time ; that is, to make the most profitable use of every day. But gaming is profitable for nothing. For if it is useless as an amusement, it is absolutely useless.

2. *Gaming is a wanton waste of our faculties and privileges.*

Every faculty and every privilege was given to us, only that we might promote the glory of God, and the real good of ourselves and our fellow-men. From labouring always to these ends there is no exemption and no excuse. 'Whether ye eat, or drink,' saith St. Paul, 'or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'—'To him who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seeks for glory, honour and immortality,' and to him only is promised 'eternal life.' Our faculties are our understanding, our affections, and our energy. Our privileges are the means of education, knowledge, virtue, usefulness, and enjoyment. But none of our faculties are benefited by gaming. The understanding is not enlarged, the affections are not improved, the energy is not invigorated ; while all these privileges are at the same time abused, and thrown away. How great a waste of what mighty blessings is here. How entire a frustration of the end of our being. With a due improvement of his faculties and privileges, every man may become wise and virtuous. How incalculable is the difference between such a man and a gamester !

A glorious privilege, the result of all those which have been mentioned, is that of *doing our duty*. But gaming is in itself, and in its consequences, an entire omission of all duty. With industry and economy the whole life of the gamester is at war. His prime employment cherishes unceasingly gross appetites, and gross passions ; and forces him to be a

stranger to *self-government*. Into the heart of a man engrossed by schemes of acquiring the property of his neighbour, by the throwing of dice, and the shuffling of cards, it is impossible that *benevolence* should enter. In acts of *beneficence*, hands which have so long been made the instruments of covetousness and plunder can never be employed.

No gamester was ever a man of *piety*, so long as he was a gamester.

Of no gamester can it be said, 'Behold, he prayeth.' The very first step towards the assumption of this character must be deep repentance for his gross and guilty life, accompanied by an entire self-abhorrence, and followed by a vigorous reformation.

3. *Gaming is a wanton and wicked waste of property.*

The end for which our property was given, is the same to which our faculties and privileges are destined. To this end, to some purpose really acceptable to God, and really useful to ourselves and others, it can always be applied. There never was a situation in which, there never was a man by whom, all his property could not be devoted to some useful purpose within his reach. But squandering money at the gaming-table is of no use either to the loser or to the winner. If the loser has common sense, he can take no pleasure in his losses. If the winner has common honesty, he can take no pleasure in his gains. Beside the suffering involved in his immediate losses, the loser forms a pernicious habit of undervaluing property; and cuts himself off both from doing and enjoying that good which the property lost might have procured. Nor is the winner more happily affected. From winning often, especially when in straitened circumstances, he soon acquires full confidence that he shall win whenever it is necessary. Hence he expends what he has gained on objects of no value. 'Male parta, male dilabuntur,' is probably a maxim in every nation; and is verified by all human experience.

With habits of this nature, we cannot wonder that gamesters, such, I mean, as devote themselves to this

employment, universally become beggars. 'Wealth,' says Solomon, 'gotten by vanity, is diminished: that is, wealth acquired by vain and dishonest courses of life.' 'Drowsiness,' says the same profound observer of human life and manners, 'will clothe a man with rags.' Drowsiness here intends that course of conduct, which, in opposition to the steady energy and vigorous efforts of industry, aims at obtaining a subsistence by dishonest and low-minded arts. Such were the facts three thousand years ago: such are the facts at the present hour. In the whole list of jockeys and sharpers, it is rare in this, and probably in all other countries, that we find a man possessed of even moderate property. Those, who are most successful, acquire such habits of expense, such expectations of supplying their wants by playing at any time, and consequently such a contempt for economy, and even for common prudence, that they become poor of course. The old age of a gamester is the cold and comfortless evening of a forlorn and miserable day.

4. *Gaming is the destruction of character.*

'A good name,' says Solomon, 'is better than great riches, and loving favour, than silver and gold.' A fair, unblemished reputation is one of the chief blessings of man; one of his prime enjoyments; one of his principal means of usefulness. Without it he can obtain neither influence, nor confidence; neither profitable employment, nor real friends. But no gamester was ever respected *as such*. Whatever talents or advantages he may otherwise have possessed, his character has been always sunk by his gaming. Look around the world, and judge for yourselves. You never knew, and therefore never will know, a gamester, who in this character was regarded by his neighbours with esteem. Common sense steadily attaches disgrace to the name. So conscious of this fact are the whole class of gamesters, that they usually take effectual pains to carry on their wretched employment in scenes of solitude and secrecy, where they are effectually hidden from the eyes of mankind.

But who that possesses common sobriety, or even sanity of mind, who that is not a fair candidate for Bedlam, would voluntarily destroy the blessing of his own good name? The *slanderer*, who blasts the reputation of another, is universally and justly regarded with abhorrence. What the slanderer does for another, the gamester does for himself. The slanderer is a vile and abominable wretch. In what respect is the gamester less vile and abominable? The slanderer is an assassin; the gamester is a suicide.

5. *Gaming is the direct road to many other sins.*

Every gamester, with too few exceptions to deserve notice, becomes a sharper of course. High expectations of acquiring property suddenly, distressing disappointments, great gains, and great losses instantaneously experienced, strong hopes alternated with strong fears, and holding the mind habitually in a state of anxious suspense, regularly prove too powerful for the honesty of every man who has not too much virtue to be a gamester. By what is called *fair play* he fails of being successful. A series of ill success tempts him to play *unfairly*. Ultimately, he is charged with it. He denies it; and is thus guilty of falsehood. The charge is reiterated. He swears to the truth of his denial; and is thus guilty of perjury. His oath is doubted. He becomes angry, profane, and furious; and not unfrequently engages in a quarrel to vindicate his wounded honour. At times the dispute is terminated by a duel. In all ordinary circumstances, his affections become sour, and his mind envious at the success of his companions, and malicious towards their persons. At the same time he is prompted to murmur at his ill success; to curse what he calls his luck, but what is in truth a dispensation of God; and to adopt a course of profane, blasphemous, and fiend-like language. To close this wretched detail, the gamester very often terminates his miserable career with drunkenness, and not unfrequently with self-murder. Who, that is not lost to every hope of virtue, who that is not lost to com-

mon sense and common feeling, can be willing to thrust himself into a course of life, or in the entrance upon a course of life, which presents at the very gate most formidable temptations to these enormous sins? Who would be willing that a father, a husband, a brother, or a son should be guilty of these sins, or exposed to these temptations? This question will probably never be answered. Will it then be said, that men are found who love these relations better than themselves? It will not be said. But it must be said, because it is true, that multitudes of men resort to the gaming-table with an infantine giddiness of mind; a hair-brained spirit of adventure; a greedy avarice, and a treacherous confidence in their own watchfulness against temptations; in that prudent care which, always seen with microscopic eyes, they considered as abundantly sufficient to secure themselves from every danger. Thus, while 'the really prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself,' these 'simple' self-deceived beings 'pass on, and are punished'

From these considerations it is, if I mistake not, evident beyond debate, that gaming is a gross fraud; that, in many other points of view, it is an enormous sin; and that it is, in an alarming degree, fatal to all the real interests of man. There are, however, persons, who, because they escape some of the dangers, and avoid some of the iniquities connected with this practice, will flatter themselves that they are scarcely chargeable with the rest. They may not claim the character of virtue; but they will insist that their conduct is almost, if not entirely, innocent; and will at least believe themselves, if guilty at all, to be guilty only in a very minute degree. To these persons let me seriously address the following considerations:—

(1.) *Gaming is an appearance of evil.*

'Abstain from all appearance of evil,' is a command of the same God, who said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart;' and is therefore armed with the same authority. But every person of piety,

and almost every sober man, pronounces gaming to be an evil. It cannot therefore be denied to be an appearance of evil. By the arguments here advanced, it has been shewn, unless I am deceived, to be a real and dreadful evil. That every man, therefore, is bound to abstain from it cannot be questioned.

(2.) *Every gamester feels it to be an evil.*

In all the early parts of his addiction to this course of life, he will find himself frequently employed, if he has any moral principles at all, in devising arguments and excuses to quiet his own conscience, and justify himself to others. This is not the conduct of a man who feels himself innocent. No person ever sought an excuse for prayer, for honest industry, for the pious education of children, or for a faithful attendance on the public worship of God. Most persons at the gaming-table are sensibly disturbed by the unexpected presence of a wise and good man. But such persons create no disturbance in the minds of those who believe themselves to be virtuously employed. Were the Redeemer of mankind again upon earth, no person who acknowledged his character would be willing to be found by him at a gaming table.

(3.) *Gaming cannot be prayed for.*

Nothing can be right or innocent for which we cannot pray. In all pursuits which he believes to be justifiable, every man can without difficulty ask for the blessing of God. But no man ever asked, no man ever will ask, that is, seriously and solemnly, or in other words really, for the blessing of God upon the employment of gaming. But that which cannot be prayed for is sinful.

(4.) *Neither gaming, nor the circumstances which regularly attend it, can be recited at the day of judgment.*

I call upon every gamester solemnly to consider, whether he will be able to come before 'the Judge of the quick and the dead,' and declare to Him with confidence, or even with hope, that he has spent life, or any part of it, in the business of gaming. But the conduct which cannot be rehearsed then, cannot be right now. Who can soberly approve in this world,

of that which will condemn him in the world to come?

There are many persons who condemn what is called *gambling*, or *gaming for money*, and who yet appear to think themselves justified in *gaming for mere amusement*. Let me exhort all such persons to remember, that, whatever influence this conduct may have upon themselves, it will, as an example, be *pernicious to others*. Multitudes will know that they game, who will never know that they do not game for money. Multitudes also will be either unable, or uninclined, to make any serious distinction between these kinds of conduct. All these will directly plead the example as a justification of themselves, or at least as a palliation of their own guilt. This will peculiarly be the fact, where the persons concerned are persons of reputation; and, unfortunately, a considerable number of those who employ themselves in gaming for amusement, are of this character. The example of one such person will be pleaded by all who know it. Under the wings of one such man, a multitude of gamblers, almost all of whom are without reputation, and great numbers low, contemptible beings, will gather; and feel themselves brooded in safety, and secured from the dreaded intrusions of public censure. Were gambling unfurnished with reputable and fashionable examples, it would, I think, be easily exterminated from the world. Every person possessed of a generally fair character may therefore feel assured, that, if he games for amusement, he is one of the means, and not a small one, of keeping gambling alive among mankind; and that he contributes efficaciously to the existence of all the sin and all the misery which it will produce at future periods.

To these observations it will probably be replied, 'Must I deny myself an innocent pleasure, because my neighbour is pleased to make a bad use of my example?' St. Paul has long since answered this question. 'For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat

flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak, Rom. xiv. 20, 21. And again, 1 Cor. viii. 13, 'Wherefore, if meat make my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.' However innocent gaming for amusement may be, it cannot be more innocent than 'eating flesh,' than doing that which the apostle has pronounced 'pure.' Yet the apostle, and God who inspired him, have declared, that whatever occasions our brother to stumble or fall into sin, it is good not to do, however innocent it may be otherwise; and the apostle has declared, that he would not do this, even though 'eating flesh,' so innocent, so directly allowed by God, and so important as food for man, were the thing in question, no, 'not while the world standeth.' Nay, he has farther declared in the verse preceding that last quoted, that when in such cases 'we wound the weak conscience of our brother, we sin against Christ.' All this he declares concerning eating flesh, and concerning every other innocent thing. If then our gaming for *amusement* be, what it cannot fail to be, a cause of inducing others to game for *money*, to become gamesters, and to fall into any or all of these sins; then in gaming for amusement we sin against Christ, by wounding the conscience of our weaker brethren, and becoming the direct means of tempting them to sin.

The supposition here made is, however, false. Gaming for amusement, in such as are either partially or wholly *games of chance*, particularly with *cards and dice*, is not and cannot be innocent. It is, almost of course, a sinful waste of time. As an amusement it is unnecessary and useless. It refreshes neither the mind nor the body; and fails therefore essentially of being a lawful amusement. Better amusements can always be substituted for it; particularly exercise, reading, and conversation; and among amusements, as well as among employments, we are bound to select the best in our power. The controversy, the hope of victory, the reluctance to be vanquished, and

universally that continual state of suspense and anxiety always experienced in gaming, have, although in a less degree, substantially the same influence on the mind, and are furnished with the same temptations, which are found in gaming for money. In addition to these things, gaming for money is almost always the consequence of an addiction to gaming for amusement. The expectation that we shall be able to withstand the allurements by which others have fallen, is a mere and ruinous presumption; the presumption of 'a man, wise in his own conceit;' of whom 'there is less hope than of a fool.' The probabilities, that we shall fall where so many have fallen, are millions to one; and the contrary opinion is only a dream of lunacy. At the same time, no man can stand up in his closet before his Maker, and thank him for the privilege of gaming to-day, or ask his blessing, to enable him to game to-morrow.

But the influence of example is abundantly sufficient to prove the sinfulness of gaming for amusement. Call to mind the extent to which this evil has spread. Think what amazing multitudes have been corrupted, distressed, and ruined by it for this world, and that which is to come. Think how many families have been plunged by it in beggary, and overwhelmed by it in vice. Think how many persons have become liars at the gaming-table, how many perjured, how many drunkards, how many blasphemers, how many suicides. 'If Europe,' said Montesquieu, 'is to be ruined, it will be ruined by gaming.' Remember that, unless persons of reputation gamed for amusement, persons without reputation would soon cease to game for money. Then call to mind, that *your* example is one of the means which produce all these evils, and continue the practice, together with its miserable consequences, in the world. Remember, that you set the snare, spread the corruption, and effectuate the ruin; that you help to fill the world with wretchedness and sin, and both allure and lead your fellow men to final perdition. With these plain and solemn truths in full view, look

up to God; and, if you can, declare that there is no sin in gaming for amusement.

SERMON CXXV.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH AND VERACITY.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
—EXOD. XX. 16.

THE preceding command was intended to secure justice to mankind: this was intended to establish truth.

The word *truth* denotes, among other things,

1. *Such declarations as are accordant with the real state of things.*

2. *That division of truth, which is called moral, or evangelical.*

3. *Veracity, or a disposition to speak truth.*

4. *Faithfulness, or a disposition to fulfil exactly promises, trusts, and covenants.*

Under this command are properly ranged the following subjects:—

I. *Truth.*

II. *Lying.*

III. *Perjury.*

IV. *Slander.*

These I propose to consider in the order specified.

The first of them, viz. *truth*, shall occupy the present Discourse. In examining it, it is my design to consider the nature and importance of truth, and the importance of veracity.

Concerning the former of these subjects I observe.

1. *That truth is an account of the real state of things.*

Mathematical truth is an account of the real state of number, and quantity, together with their various relations; philosophical truth understood in the na-

tural sense, of material bodies, and their operations and *moral truth*, of intelligent beings, their relations, their duties, and their actions.

The *real state of things*, is that with which only we have any concern; and with this our concern is infinite. In the *present world*, so far as the present world only is concerned, our whole interest is involved in the real state of ourselves, our business and the subjects of it; our families, our country, and mankind. The collection of truths which we receive concerning these and other subjects, is what is called *knowledge*; our guide to all that conduct which may be useful to us, and our security against that which may be noxious. The truth that bread is wholesome food, enables us to eat it with safety. A falsehood in this case might lead us to swallow poison. A knowledge of the true state of our farms and of agriculture enables us to cultivate our farms with profit. A knowledge of the real state of the markets enables us to trade with safety and success. A knowledge of the real characters of men enables us to choose those who will be our real friends; and secures us from inviting to our friendship base and treacherous men. Misapprehension, in these respects, would ruin both our business and ourselves.

In the *moral world*, the truth concerning God, his pleasure, ourselves, the relations which we sustain to him and to each other, and the duties springing from these relations, enables us to obey him, to become blessings to each other, and to obtain the blessings of immortality. Falsehood, in these respects, would lead us infinitely astray. False apprehensions of God have led a great part of mankind to worship devils, men, beasts, trees, stocks, and stones; to mistake sin for virtue, and ruin for safety. No man ever dreamed that his interests lay in the regions of fiction, or that his sober correspondence should be carried on with fairies and genii. But the man who embraces falsehood, and is governed by it, places his interests, so far, in a world equally visionary; and corresponds not with real beings,

but with creatures of fancy. As happiness can never come to us from the regions of fiction, or their imaginary inhabitants; so happiness never sprang, and never will spring, from false views of the real world, and its real inhabitants. Our only connexion with these objects is through the medium of truth, or the knowledge of their real state.

2. *Truth is, in itself, a rich source of enjoyment.*

By this I intend, that it is an object immediately enjoyed; and that when presented to the mind it communicates pleasure of course.

Fiction may be in this sense, and I acknowledge often is, a source of real enjoyment to the mind. God, to raise our views to a better world than that which has been ruined by our apostasy, and to awaken in us desires for a nobler happiness than any which this world supplies, has made us capable of forming many delightful objects in our imagination, many which are beautiful, many which are sublime, and many which are wonderful. On these the mind rests with pleasure during short periods, especially in youth; and, so long as they are regarded as objects of imagination merely, they are sources of pleasure which may be really enjoyed, and to a considerable extent. But when any fiction is changed into a falsehood; when it ceases to be an object of the imagination, and becomes an object of belief; it is always, sooner or later, a source of suffering, and not of enjoyment. Even in the character of fiction, it gradually loses its power to please. As we advance in years, the love of truth, considered as a source of pleasure merely, takes its place; and the mind seeks for enjoyment in knowledge, and not in the exercises of imagination.

But truth is always capable of yielding more delight to the mind than fiction; or, in other words, intellectual enjoyment is always capable of being superior to that which flows in by the fancy. The actual state of things which God has made is in every respect more beautiful, glorious, and desirable than any which the mind can imagine. Every person

who understands the modes in which the mind is actively employed in forming complex ideas, whether of the intellect or the imagination, knows that all such ideas are made out of those which it receives from objects really existing. These it can compound and compare; but can add to them nothing but what it has already perceived. New beauty, new sublimity, new loveliness, it can form, only by bringing together in new unions the perception of beauty, sublimity, and loveliness which it has derived either from the actual state of things, or from revelation. In the objects formed by the fancy, therefore, there can be nothing in degree more sublime, beautiful, or lovely than that which it has already received. In conformity with these observations, no object was ever described by the pen of men, so as to make the impression of sublimity equally with the object itself. No images in human writings were ever so sublime as those of inspiration. No character formed by the imagination was ever to be compared with that of Christ.

When I speak of the actual state of things which God has made, as in every respect more beautiful, glorious, and desirable than any which the mind can imagine, I mean the whole state of things. The universe is a single system. Every thing belonging to it is a necessary, and proper part of the system; such a part as infinite wisdom thought it best to make; and therefore such as was more desirable than any thing else in its place. The whole, taken together, is a perfect system; the result of the perfect views of the all-perfect mind. In such a sense is it perfect, that it is truly said, 'Jehovah shall rejoice in his works:' that is, because all, united, are such as to accomplish to the utmost, the good pleasure of his boundless wisdom. The truth concerning this system, or the knowledge of its real state, will for ever delight, as well as enlarge the minds of virtuous and immortal beings.

In the present world, imperfect, prejudiced, and narrow as our minds are, the exhibitions of truth

concerning this subject in the Scriptures are not only superior to every thing conceived by the human imagination, but more delightful to every virtuous being; more delightful beyond comparison, as well as superior beyond degree. The character of God, the mediation of the Redeemer, the agency of the Divine Spirit, the dispensations of infinite mercy, the restoration of sinners to virtue and happiness, the consummation of all things, the blessings of immortality, the glory of heaven, and the future union of sanctified minds in that delightful world, leave out of sight and out of remembrance all the creations of poetry, all the splendid excursions of imagination. 'Into these things, angels desire to look.' All those whose minds are attuned to the disposition of angels, love to follow them in this divine employment. Nay, God himself, regards this combination of wonderful objects as a glorious picture, an illustrious emanation of his own wisdom, which he beholds for ever with the smiles of infinite complacency.

3. *That great division of truth, which is called moral, or evangelical truth, is, in an important sense, the foundation of all virtue.*

'Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth;' said our Saviour, in his intercessory prayer; John xvii. 17.—'Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth,' James i. 17.—'The truth,' said Christ to the Jews, 'shall make you free.' From these declarations it is completely evident, that evangelical truth is the means of that mighty change in the human soul, by which, according to the strong language of the Scriptures, it is, 'turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.'

'The law of the Lord,' says David, 'is perfect, converting the soul.' But the law of God is nothing but truth communicated in the preceptive form. All its influence on the soul is derived from this fact; and, were it not conformed to truth, or were it, in other words, founded on falsehood, its moral influ-

ence would cease. Particularly, its influence to produce this conversion would be annihilated. Truth then is, in this point of view, of just as much importance to the happiness of mankind, and to the glory of God, as the salvation of all the millions who have been or will be saved.

Falsehood, or error, has in the mean time never had the least influence towards the accomplishment of this glorious purpose. From the erroneous moral systems of men, no individual ever gained the least tendency towards real virtue. Truths, indeed, these systems have always involved; and the influence of these truths has so far been felt by mankind, as to prompt them to many commendable actions, and to prevent them from becoming as abandoned as they would otherwise have been. The errors which they contained have, so far as they were believed, been the means of sin only. Of cordial and thorough reformation they have been absolutely barren. Truth and falsehood have been blended in them with such confusion, as to be inseparable by the men who embraced them, without very different efforts from those which they have been inclined and, in most cases, able to make. They have therefore been swallowed whole; and have produced just such effects as a mind enlightened by revelation could not fail to foresee. Error became the predominating rule of action to all their votaries; and the truth was chiefly lost and forgotten.

But moral truth is not merely a rule to teach us what virtue is, and to guide us ultimately to this glorious attainment. To discern it with the understanding, and to welcome it to the heart, is virtue itself as existing in the soul; and, when carried out into action, conformed also to its dictates, is all which is included in the name of virtue. In other words *virtue is nothing but voluntary obedience to truth.*

Falsehood on the contrary, is the foundation of all iniquity. It leads the soul only away from duty from virtue, from salvation, and from God. To the reformation it is only hostile. To the reforma-

tion and happiness of man it is ruinous. It promotes no cause, but that of Satan ; it forms no character, but that of sin. All the just definitions of *sin* are involved in this ; that it is nothing but *voluntary obedience to error*.

In the mean time, all the *motives* to virtue are found in the general system of truth ; as all the motives to sin are found in systems of error. Error contains nothing in it to prompt us to obey God, to perform our duty, or to seek the salvation of ourselves and others. As a motive, or combination of motives, error contains nothing but inducements to sin ; and truth nothing but inducements to holiness. In all these important particulars, truth is the basis of virtue.

It cannot be thought strange, then, that ‘love,’ or evangelical excellence, or, in other words, real virtue, should ‘rejoice in the truth ;’ that holiness should be styled by St. Paul, ‘holiness of truth ;’ or that ‘those who know not God, and obey not the gospel,’ or truth, ‘of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ should be classed together in the ruin of the final day.

By these views of the importance of truth, we are naturally led to the second subject of discourse, *viz.* *veracity*.

The importance of veracity will sufficiently appear from the following considerations :—

1. *Almost all the truth which we know, we derive from communication ; and, of course, almost all the benefits of truth which we enjoy.*

A man deprived of the communication of others, and left wholly to his own observation, would possess little more knowledge than a brute. It would be no easy matter to explain how he could subsist. If we suppose him to subsist through the ordinary period of human life, it is certain that he would know nothing beside his own feelings, and the little number of objects which fell under his observation. Even of these he would rather form ideas, than possess knowledge. Of the relations between them he must remain almost absolutely ignorant. Nor would he

easily acquire the skill necessary to construct even the simplest propositions. Still less would he be able to reason, to illustrate, and to prove. In a word, his mind would rise in very few things above that of a dog, or an elephant ; while, in almost all, he would fall far below them.

As he would know scarcely any thing concerning the present world, so it is plain, he would know nothing of the world to come. Of God, of duty, of virtue, and of immortality, he would not form a single idea. Nor could he, without manifest impropriety, be styled a rational being. How could such a man enjoy the benefits of truth at all ?

The difference between this man, as an intelligent being, and Newton, Berkeley, or Locke, is made by *communication*. The mass of ideas accumulated by an individual is communicated to others ; and those of a preceding generation, to the generation which follows. By the labours of many individuals, and in the progress of successive generations, the knowledge formed out of these ideas has increased to that height and extent which exist at the present period. Every kind of business, art, and science has been thus brought to the perfection in which we possess it ; and all the benefits which these things confer upon the present race of mankind are derived solely from communication. For our knowledge of the future world we are indebted wholly to communications from God. To the same source we are indebted for the chief knowledge which we possess concerning the moral system. All this knowledge is indeed contained in the Scriptures ; yet a part of it may be, and has been, acquired without their assistance. To this knowledge we are indebted for the direction, comfort, and hope which we enjoy in the character of moral beings ; as we are to natural knowledge for the necessities and conveniences of the present life. To communication, therefore, we owe almost every thing, whether present or future, which can be called desirable.

But the whole value, the whole usefulness, of com-

information, is derived solely from the truths which it conveys. False information can be of no use to us. As our own concern lies with the real state of things, and the good or evil which we are to enjoy or suffer, is dependant on our knowledge of that state, and the conduct dictated by this knowledge, it is evident that the information which leads us to conceive erroneously of the things with which we are connected, will both hinder us from the acquisition of good, and expose us to the sufferance of evil. The measures by which we design to acquire good, and to avoid evil, will in both cases fail of their effect; because, being founded on erroneous apprehensions, they will be unsuited to the existing state of things, and therefore to the accomplishment of the intended purpose. If we are falsely informed of business, we shall conduct it unhappily; if of the markets, we shall buy and sell with loss; if of our duty, we shall perform it amiss, or not at all; if of the means of salvation, we shall fail of it; if of the character and pleasure of God, we shall offend him in all our attempted services. Thus it is plain, that all the benefits of communication are dependant on its truth, and that almost every benefit of truth, experienced by rational beings, is derived from their mutual veracity.

2. *Veracity is the only foundation of confidence.*

Confidence is the great bond of society among intelligent beings. Intelligent creatures are supremely dependant on their Creator, and, to a vast extent, on each other. From him, ultimately, they derive all the good which they enjoy; and without his perpetual protection and blessing, they must not only be miserable, but must perish. A great part of these blessings he has been pleased to communicate to us through the instrumentality and agency of his rational creatures. To them immediately we are indebted for blessings, innumerable in their multitude, incalculable in their importance, and indispensable to our daily safety, peace, and comfort, and not unfrequently to the continuance of our lives. So numerous and so continual are these blessings, that they are

generally regarded as things of course ; and pass by us unnoticed and unseen.

Originally, all these blessings are unpossessed by us : all of them from time to time being future. It is necessary, therefore, that we should provide for the acquisition of them by such means as are in our power. As for almost all of them we must be indebted to the agency of others ; we are compelled, unavoidably, to rely on their engagements to supply them. Here the field opens in which confidence is to be exercised ; and, almost at our very entrance into life, it becomes boundless. We are obliged to trust to parents and others for protection, food, raiment, and innumerable other things, indispensable to our subsistence, as well as our comfort, from infancy to manhood. The offices for which we rely are necessary, and are rendered ; the benefits are indispensable, and are communicated, every day, hour, and moment. Confidence is thus diffused every where, and at all times. We trust as naturally and unceasingly as we breathe, and with as little consciousness of the fact. In the same manner is the same confidence extended through life, exercised every moment, placed, in a greater or less degree, on every person with whom we correspond ; and employed about every object with which we have any concern. If we could not confide, we should, in a sense, know nothing, acquire nothing, and do nothing to any valuable purpose.

Equally indebted are we to confidence for almost the whole of our happiness. The emotion is delightful in itself, and indispensable to every other delightful emotion. It is equally pleasant to trust, and to be trusted. No supposable union of esteem and good-will is more pleasing, more elevated, or more refined. Accordingly, it is thus regarded by those who exercise it, and by those towards whom it is exercised. Parents are never more delighted than in the entire confidence of their children. Children are never more happy than when they entirely confide in their parents.

Equally necessary is confidence to the existence and operations of government. Indeed, government without it would be a nullity. Even the despot himself must rely on a numerous train of agents for the accomplishment of his purposes. Without their co-operation, he could do nothing towards the control of his subjects, beyond what he could accomplish by his own physical strength. Accordingly, he is always compelled to buy the assistance of such agents with extensive gratuities of wealth and honour, as well as to force it by terror.

Virtuous rulers, who govern a free people by laws, and by influence, stand only on the mutual confidence of themselves and their subjects. Withdraw this confidence, and the government is annihilated at once. The rulers become powerless, and the society is lost in anarchy.

A state of absolute distrust is a state of absolute misery. Like the cold hand of death, distrust would dissolve the whole frame and texture of the social body; the joints and the ligaments, the energy and the life. A country could no longer contain its inhabitants, nor even the den its banditti. Such a state of things in this world has hitherto never existed in the absolute sense.

Without confidence, God himself would cease to be the moral governor of intelligent creatures. As I have elsewhere considered this subject, it will be the less necessary to insist upon it here. Still, a few observations concerning it cannot be improper.

It is clear, even to a very limited and obtuse apprehension, that without confidence in a ruler, voluntary obedience can never exist; that without voluntary obedience God can never be pleased with his intelligent creatures, since no other can be honourable to him; and that, without the same obedience, those creatures can never be amiable in his sight, since no other can render them virtuous. Distrust is an absolute separation of those beings in whom it exists, from those towards whom it is exercised. A being distrusted can never be loved re-

verenced, nor voluntarily obeyed. Of such obedience, confidence is the commencement, the soul, and the substance. But where there is no truth in the ruler, there can be no confidence in the subject. However great, however knowing, the Divine ruler might be supposed or perceived to be, his greatness and knowledge would, unless accompanied by veracity, only inspire suspense and terror; suspense and terror pervading the intelligent universe, distracting every heart, and filling every world with agitation and anguish. Omnipotence would indeed enable him to compel an external conformity to his pleasure; but the obedience rendered, would be the obedience of slaves, and not of children. It is a plain moral impossibility, that a being without veracity should be respected or loved. However great and splendid an earthly ruler may be, however successful in his designs, however magnificent in his mode of living, however distinguished for his talents, and however liberal in his largesses; he would, if a liar, be still a base and contemptible being. Falsehood in an infinite Being would render him infinitely contemptible. Even the benevolence of the gospel, without truth (if it were possible to separate them), would be changed into a kind of amiable weakness, a silly, wavering, good nature, and would cease to command respect.

A ruler without truth could offer no motives to his subjects, which could induce them to obey. Should he enact laws, promise rewards, and threaten penalties; it would be very uncertain whether the law prescribed the conduct which would be agreeable to him; whether the rewards would be given to such as faithfully obeyed; or whether the penalties would be inflicted on such as disobeyed. Whatever he promised, whatever he threatened, no reliance could be placed on his declarations; and they could therefore hold out no motives to obedience. But a moral government is a government operating by motives and without motives cannot exist.

Thus it is completely evident, that the kingdom of

God, or his government of the intelligent universe, rests upon truth, as its foundation.

3. *Veracity is the source of inestimable personal good.*

Veracity is the first constituent of an honourable, and even of a fair reputation. A bad man, who is known always to speak truth, will always command a considerable share of respect; but a liar is despised of course. So contemptible is falsehood, that to charge any man with this vice is universally regarded as the last affront which scorn and ill-nature are able to offer; as an injury for which an atonement can scarcely be made.

Without veracity, virtue, as has been heretofore remarked, can in no sense exist. To the existence of virtue then in our own minds, veracity is indispensable.

Equally indispensable is it to self-approbation. Conscience, like God, always delights in truth, and always approves of speaking truth. This approbation it faithfully and invariably whispers to the soul. Few enjoyments can be compared with self-approbation. It is delightful; it is full of peace, comfort, and hope; it is independent of time and accident, of friends and enemies. The world cannot give it: the world cannot take it away.

Conscience, on the other hand, abhors a lie, and solemnly and dreadfully reproaches the liar. Wherever falsehood is loved and uttered, conscience pierces the soul with stings of agony; and holds up to the culprit a dreadful mirror, by which all his deformity and guilt are forced upon his view. The terrible likeness he is compelled to own. At the sight of this awful image he trembles, falters, and reluctantly, but irresistibly, sinks beneath the proper level of his nature.

Veracity is the source also of all personal dignity. There is no dignity without consistency of character. A merely fickle, changeable man, although intentionally sincere, is at the best but a mere trifle; and can never be the subject of real respectability. Moral inconsistency is still more hostile to dignity. The subject of it is to every eye, not only contemptible

but odious. To himself particularly he appears of necessity base and despicable ; and is forced to feel, that by his own crimes he has sunk himself below the proper character and rank of man.

Veracity makes us like to God. This glorious Being styles himself ' a God of truth,' and declares it to be impossible that he should lie. Truth is the moral immutability of his character, and the moral consistency of finite intelligences. Him truth surrounds with dignity infinite : them it exalts to a resemblance of him which is divine and eternal ; an image of supreme excellence and beauty.

Veracity is no less the source of usefulness. Men never voluntarily employ those, in whom they do not place confidence. ' As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the loiterer to him that sendeth him.' The fear of being deceived, the suspense and anxiety which we necessarily feel, when our affairs are in the hands of unfaithful men, soon forbid a repetition of the same experiment. Equally unwilling are we in all ordinary cases, to be employed by men of this character. Such men demand from us services, expect from us compliances, and propose to us terms, inconsistent both with comfort and integrity ; and, when our services are performed, they will usually, so far as safety will permit, and their own convenience may require, defraud us of our proper reward. I know of but one exception to these remarks. Bad men do, I acknowledge, employ bad men to promote a bad cause : but even they confide useful honourable employment only to persons of integrity. Equally necessary is this attribute to the production and establishment of that influence which constitutes a great part of the usefulness of every useful man. A liar can neither convince others, nor persuade others. Others cannot engage with him in any serious, useful design. They cannot enter into his service, nor employ him in theirs, with safety or hope. His falsehood is a blast upon his character and upon his interests alike. He who is connected with him, lives in continual fear of being betrayed ; and he only who

shuns him is either happy or safe.

Finally : *Veracity is indispensable to our acceptance with God.* The psalmist, when he inquires, 'Who shall ascend into the tabernacle of the Highest?' solemnly answers, 'He that speaketh truth in his heart ; he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.' Such is the universal language of the Scriptures. 'Lying lips,' saith the wise man, 'are an abomination unto the Lord.'—'There shall in nowise enter into the city any thing that defileth ; nor he that loveth and maketh a lie.' Every liar therefore knows that he is in a state of condemnation ; that hitherto he has no title to endless life, nor a single hope of final acceptance with God. Before these blessings can be begun, his ruling character must be renounced. He, who 'requireth truth in the inward parts,' can turn no eye but that of indignation and abhorrence upon a soul polluted with falsehood, and instamped with the foul image of him who 'was a liar from the beginning, and the father of it.' In heaven a liar would be a gazing-stock, a spot on the beautiful and glorious aspect of that glorious world, a curse to himself, and a nuisance to its exalted inhabitants !

There is one world in the universe, and, so far as we are informed, but one, in which truth is unknown, and falsehood reigns and ravages. Here 'all liars have their part ;' and all who dwell here are liars. Here to deceive, and to be deceived, is the base employment, and the wretched lot. Truth here is never spoken, unless to deceive, and confidence is never exercised. Friendship, sociality, the union of hearts, and the interchange of affections, are never found in this dreary and dreadful region. In the midst of millions every individual is alone. A gloomy and terrible solitude broods over the desolate vast ; and the eye of suffering and sorrow, stretching its look of anguish above, around, beneath, finds no friend in whom it may confide ; no bosom on which it may repose with comfort, peace, or hope.

How different is that delightful residence, where all who love and speak truth are, by the boundless

goodness of the Creator, united in a divine and blissful assembly! Here truth by every member of this vast and happy family is loved, studied, embraced, and spoken, for ever. Confidence here enters the soul, and takes up in this unsullied mansion its eternal residence. Friendship, the twin-sister of confidence, dwells and smiles by her side, and sheds upon the purified mind her immortal enjoyments; while God with infinite complacency beholds this illustrious work of his own hands, and showers around it with eternal profusion the ever-growing blessings of his unchangeable love.

SERMON CXXVI.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF LYING.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

EXOD. XX. 16.

IN the preceding Discourse I considered, at some length, the nature and importance of truth and veracity. These are the basis of the precept in the text. I shall now go on to examine the immediate subject of the text, viz. *falsehood*, under the two following heads:—

I. *Lying*.

II. *Slander*.

Under the former of these heads I shall include *promise-breaking* and *perjury*.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose to consider,

The nature,

The causes,

The mischiefs, and

The preventives of lying.

Concerning the first of these subjects, viz. the na-

ture of lying, I observe generally, that a lie is a false declaration of facts, wilfully made, or made, as is sometimes the case, from indifference to truth.

A false promise is a crime substantially of the same nature with a lie in the proper sense. A lie is a false declaration of existing facts: a false promise is a false declaration of future facts.

Perjury is a false declaration either of present or future facts, wilfully made, accompanied by an oath.

Perjury in evidence, is a false declaration, under oath, of existing facts. Perjury under an oath of office or trust, is a false declaration of future facts. The future facts here referred to are universally such as are supposed to be under our own control, and are chiefly such as are involved in our own conduct. Such at least is the case, when the oath or promise is lawfully made.

Mankind are guilty of lying, that is, substantially guilty, in the following ways:—

1. In voluntary declarations of facts which are known to be false.

For example: every narration known to be false is a lie. Equally such is every description of a similar nature.

2. In declaring that to be true, which we believe to be otherwise; although, in the end, it should be found that the truth was really declared.

To our minds that is true, or false, which after careful examination we believe to be so. Before we make our declarations, we are bound to examine as impartially and as thoroughly as we can. After such an examination, if we declare agreeably to the best knowledge which we are able thus to obtain, and with no more confidence than such an examination warrants, our veracity is, I apprehend, unimpeachable. We may indeed mistake; but are in no sense guilty of lying. But if we declare that which is contrary to our belief, although the declaration should be exactly true, we are still intentionally and therefore in the criminal sense, liars.

3. In rashly asserting what is not true, when the as-

assertion springs from a sinful neglect of examining.

Inconsiderate and rash men assert roundly, although they do not know that which they assert to be true, and have no sufficient reasons for believing it to be true. This conduct is derived only from the want of a just sense of the importance of truth, and the value of veracity. Such a sense will prompt every man who possesses it to examine before he asserts; to assert with watchfulness and caution; and, where he does not feel himself warranted to make unqualified declarations, to express his belief, his opinion, or his apprehension.

No excuse can be given for this indifference to truth. To mankind its importance is infinite. The sacrifice of it is, in all instances, an injury which can neither be repaired, nor recalled. Every man is bound to regard it in this manner, to enable himself to speak truth only, whenever he speaks at all. He therefore who by a voluntary negligence is led rashly to make false assertions, is without excuse.

4. *In professing to declare the whole truth, and yet concealing a part of it, with an intention to deceive.*

A wilful deception is here intended, and accomplished; the very thing which constitutes the essence of lying. The means, indeed, differ; but the spirit, the guilt, and the purpose are the same.

There is, I acknowledge, a prudent and justifiable concealment, as well as a guilty one. What others have not a right to know, we are not bound to declare. Nor are we, of course, bound to disclose the whole of a subject, in many cases, where we may be willing to communicate a part. But in every case our disclosures and our concealments must be exactly accordant with our professions. The writer who professes to record the whole of a story, is inexcusable if he narrate only a part; although every thing which he actually declares may be true. The witness who, under the oath of evidence, withholds any thing which he knows pertaining to the subject in debate, is perjured.

5. *In colouring the subject of our declarations so as*

to give it a different aspect from the true one.

This is an extensive field of falsehood ; too extensive, indeed, to be thoroughly explored at the present time.

A common mode of transgressing in the way here generally described, is to represent the conduct of others truly, perhaps, as to the *principal facts*, and to surround it with such circumstances, annex to it such appendages, and attribute it to such motives, as, taken together, will give it an appearance either partially or wholly false ; and, as is common in instances of this nature, very injurious to them.

Another mode of transgressing in this way is to exhibit the opinions or doctrines of others, not in language which they would acknowledge, but in language of our own choice ; selected for the purpose of rendering such opinions or doctrines absurd and deformed, and of rendering those who hold them odious to others. This is, almost of course, accompanied with, what is exactly of the same nature, charging upon them consequences which *we* make, and *they* disclaim.

The doctrines of the Reformation have, in a very remarkable manner, been followed and persecuted with this species of falsehood. It is at least extraordinary, if not singular, that these doctrines are never, or very rarely, if ever, represented by those who oppose them in such terms as are used by those who profess them ; but in terms which materially vary the nature of the doctrines. In this manner it is plainly intended to make them objects of alarm and abhorrence to others ; and to engage by this obliquity of representation the passions of mankind in a course of hostility against their defenders. Every class of men have undoubtedly a right to express their own opinions in their own terms ; and to admit or reject such consequences of their opinions as they think proper. The doctrines may indeed be fairly impeached, and by argument shewn to be absurd, if it can be done ; and any consequences may, so far as it can be shewn by reason, be proved to fol-

flow from them. But to vary the terms in which the doctrine is exhibited from those in which it is declared by its defenders, and to charge them with holding it in such a manner as we are pleased to express it; to draw consequences from it at our own pleasure, and exhibit them as the opinions of those with whom we contend, although disclaimed by them; is plainly disingenuous, false, and criminal.

Another example of the same nature is presented to us by *constructive narration*.

By this I intend that narration, in which the writer or speaker construes events, together with the actions, motives, and characters of those concerned in them, in such a manner as he pleases; that is, in a manner accordant with his *own views, interests, passions, and prejudices*; and interweaves his constructions in the recital, without giving any notice of this fact, so as to make them an inseparable part of the narrative. The reader here is unable to tell what is fact, and what is construction; and of course, unless preserved from it by superior discernment, is betrayed into a belief of all the errors created by the prejudices of the writer. A great part of modern history is, if I mistake not, written in this unfortunate manner; and in this respect differs essentially and unhappily from the ancient manner of narration. Falsehood is here taught in a mode which seems often to defy detection, and which, at least in my view, is inexcusable.

The ridicule of what is true, just, good, honourable, or sacred, is an evil of the same nature. The things represented by him who uses the ridicule, are commonly real; and, were they represented in their own native and true colours, would not be, and could not be, made ridiculous. But they are falsely coloured; are violently connected with appendages, with which they have naturally no connexion; are distorted, maimed, and forced into every unnatural and monstrous attitude. The ridiculousness and absurdity which cannot be found in the things themselves, are fastened upon them. When presented to

the eye once in this association, created by the hand of ill-natured ingenuity, it will be difficult for the mind to disjoin them afterward. In this manner things of the most important, solemn, and venerable nature, having been once seen in the light of absurdity through an artificial association, are often regarded as absurd and contemptible through life. No excuse can be pleaded for this unworthy and disingenuous conduct.

Of the same nature are also what are called *marvellous stories*. Persons of a lively imagination are prone greatly to admire almost every thing which they see or hear, and to find an excessive pleasure in whatever is really wonderful. With this disposition they are led to represent almost all things which they relate as extraordinary and surprising. Were we to give full credit to what they say, we should be ready to believe that their lives had passed only through scenes of a marvellous kind, and that they had hardly ever met with ordinary beings, or ordinary events. The language of these persons is, to a great extent, made up of superlatives only; and their images are drawn only in the strongest and most glowing colours.

Such persons have, I acknowledge, as little intention to deceive in many, perhaps in most, instances as other men. Still, through an eagerness to enhance every thing which they relate, the representations which they give are continually untrue; and the apprehensions which they excite are regularly erroneous. There may be, there often is, no intentional deception in their thoughts. Still, they continually deceive, and that of choice, that they may enjoy the pleasure found in the indulgence of an eager imagination.

6. *In flattery and censure.*

Flattery is the ascription of good qualities to others which they do not possess, or in greater degrees than they possess them. Sometimes this ascription is the result of the mere warmth of affection; and is then, though not wholly undeserving of censure, undoubt-

edly less criminal than in other cases. No warmth of affection, and no worth in the object of it, will, however, justify us in speaking that which is not true. Usually, it is dictated by sinister views, and intended to be the means of accomplishing unworthy purposes. In this case the author of it is a palpable, though a very pleasing, liar. The purpose which he has in view is a sinful one; and the means which he adopts to compass it are always sinful and contemptible. Accordingly, mankind have proverbially declared the flatterer to be an odious and despicable wretch.

Censure is often just and vindicable, often a duty, and not unfrequently a proof of superior worth. This, however, invariably supposes that the censure is deserved; that it is demanded by the nature of the case; and that it is administered solely to promote the good of the censured, and not to gratify the pride or ill-nature of the censurer. But as the word is used above, it is intended to denote a false denial of good qualities, or a false ascription of bad ones, adopted to gratify our own unworthy feelings, and to wound those of another. Falsehood of this nature is too well understood, and too generally detested, to need any comment.

7. *In alleging, to support a doctrine, or a cause, arguments which in our own view are unsound; or alleging those, which have some degree of soundness and weight, as having more weight than we believe; or alleging them with more confidence than we really experience in our minds.*

Veracity, as it respects arguments, demands that we allege such as in our view are really sound; that we attribute to them exactly the weight which we believe them to possess; and that we advance them with expressions of no more confidence in them than we actually feel. No reason can be alleged why we may wilfully deceive in our arguments, any more than in our declarations; or why sophistry is less guilty than what is appropriately called lying. The conduct in both cases is the same; viz. a wilful deception. The design is the same. The mischiefs also are as great in the former case, and often greater, than in the

atter. Nor can any reason be alleged to prove the guilt less.

Of the same nature is *the concealment of such arguments as we possess*, when the support of truth and justice demands them, or the overthrow of falsehood and injustice.

8. *In promise-breaking.*

A promise is an engagement to do, or abstain from, something, either absolutely or conditionally. When this engagement is made to God, it is termed a *vow*; when to our fellow-men, a *promise*. The laws of morality, which regulate both, are in substance the same. When a promise is made absolutely, or when the conditions on which it is made are performed, we are bound to fulfil it exactly, according to its tenor. Nor can we be released from this obligation, unless the performance is either impossible or unlawful; or unless by the consent of him to whom the promise is made. In every other case, the violation of the promise is a lie; at least as criminal, base, and detestable as any other.

Our obligations to veracity are greatly enhanced by an oath; one of the most solemn and affecting transactions in which man is ever concerned. In this transaction, God, our Creator, Judge, and Rewarder; God, who 'requireth truth in the inward parts'; God, who 'seeth not as man seeth,' but who 'looketh on the heart;' is invoked as an awful witness of the manner in which we speak. If we speak truth, we declare our hope of his mercy; if we speak falsely, we imprecate his vengeance. What rational being, hitherto ignorant of the perjuries which deform this guilty world, could believe that any man, thus situated, would fail to speak truth with the deepest solicitude, and the most perfect exactness! Yet perjury is in the list of human crimes, and forms no inconsiderable part of that dreadful catalogue.

The guilt of every species of lying, when perpetrated under the solemnities of an oath, is enhanced by these considerations. The sin in almost all cases is more deliberately committed. The person to whom

an oath is administered has every opportunity which he can wish, for summoning up to the view of his mind every motive to the performance of his duty and every inducement to abstain from falsehood. These inducements also are the strongest conceivable. God in a peculiar manner is present to his thoughts: 'he 'God of truth,' who has declared, that 'all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.' His soul is put at hazard on his utterance of truth or falsehood. If he speaks falsehood, he voluntarily consigns himself to perdition. If he is guilty of perjury, he is ruined also for this world. The stain is too deep ever to be wiped away. At the same time, he does what is in his power to cut up confidence by the roots. 'An oath for confirmation,' says St. Paul, 'is to men the end of all controversy,' Heb. vi. 16. If the confidence reposed in an oath could be reposed no more, human disputes must either be unsettled, or terminated by the strength of the arm. and to this end he who perjures himself does all in his power to conduct them.

At the same time, it is ever to be remembered, that God himself has been pleased on various occasions to confirm his own word by an oath. In this manner he has testified to us, that in his view an oath adds a peculiar sanction to that which has been said even by himself. Universally, he who utters a falsehood under **this** solemn obligation to speak truth, sins against all the motives which can be conceived to influence him to the performance of his duty.

The causes of lying, the second thing proposed in the scheme of this Discourse, are, generally, *all the temptations which men feel to this unhappy practice.* Men utter falsehood extensively for the acquisition of wealth, honour, power, and pleasure; to advance the purposes of party; to ensure success in a controversy; to gain a favourite point; to mortify a rival, or an enemy; and for innumerable other purposes. In the Discourse which I delivered on the subject of *frauds practised on our fellow-men*, numerous specimens of this nature were either alluded to, or expressly

mentioned. Similar specimens, perhaps equally numerous, are attendant upon the eager pursuit of all those worldly gratifications which men ardently covet. I know of no case in which lying more abounds, than that of *vehement party contention*. Universally, men, embarked in unworthy designs, as I shall have occasion to mention more particularly hereafter, find falsehood exceedingly convenient, if not indispensable to their success. Depraved as mankind are, a bad cause cannot be carried on with success, without the aid either of falsehood or the sword.

All these are *immediate* causes of lying. Those to which I have originally referred, are *more remote*. They are such as subvert the original tendency to speak truth, which we regularly find in the earliest ages of life. The influence of these causes is peculiarly exerted upon the minds of such as are young; and they are led into habits of lying, before they are capable of understanding either their guilt or their danger. These causes are principally the following:

1. *Children are often taught to lie by example.*

Few persons of adult years are perhaps sufficiently sensible how soon children begin to understand the nature of those things which they see and hear, especially the nature of human conduct. From this, as well as from other causes, it frequently happens, that many things are done and said before very young children, which would not be said or done, if it were well understood that the children would clearly comprehend, and regularly copy them. By this misapprehension the members of many a family, and unhappily the parents also, are often induced to make their children witnesses of palpable falsehoods, when, bad as themselves are, they would not corrupt their children in this manner, were they aware that their conduct would thus become the means of corruption. Often these falsehoods are uttered in earnest; often they are uttered in jest. In both cases their influence is alike pernicious.

The power of all example is great, especially of evil example; but perhaps in no case greater than in

that of falsehood. Here the falsehood is brought home to the child with an influence wholly peculiar. It is uttered by those whom he loves ; by those whom he venerates ; by those of whom he has never formed a disadvantageous suspicion. It is calmly and coolly told to others in his presence, without a doubt expressed of its rectitude ; and is at times accompanied by a direct explanation of the advantages which are hoped from it. At other times, it is uttered in the zeal of dispute, and the warmth of passion. At other times, a multitude of falsehoods are combined together in a marvellous story, and, in many families, such stories form no small part of the domestic conversation. At other times still, and in instances innumerable, the private history of persons and families in the neighbourhood furnishes an almost endless tissue of interwoven truth and falsehood, and constitutes the chief entertainment of the house. Families, composed of sprightly members, make also innumerable assertions in jest, which are untrue ; which the child who hears them perceives to be untrue ; and for the falsehood of which he does not perceive the sport to yield any justification.

All these even very young children will usually discern to be falsehoods. No person can wonder that they should be induced to adopt this conduct, when he remembers that it is set before them continually, in so many modes, by those who are so much the objects of affection and reverence. That children derive this turpitude, in very many instances, originally and chiefly from such an example, they themselves abundantly prove. The reason which they almost always give, and first give, for the commission of this crime, is, that others have done the same thing.

In multiplied instances, *falsehoods are directly told to children*, particularly very young children, to persuade them to acquiesce cheerfully in things which are disagreeable. Children, like older persons, have many wishes, the gratification of which is in their view important to their happiness ; but which others know to be fraught with danger and mischief. To

persuade them quietly to give up such gratifications, parents, and others, frequently adopt the easy and convenient method of deceiving them. Thus parents, who wish to go abroad, and to persuade their young children to remain at home, often declare, that they are going out to return immediately; while the children clearly discern that the declaration is false. When parents also, or others, are abroad, whose absence is very painful to children; servants, and others, to quiet them, declare often that the parents are returning, are in sight, or will return within a very short time. To persuade them to take medicines, the children are assured, that they are sweet and pleasant; when, in truth, they are bitter and loathsome. To conceal from them designs also, and facts, which it is undesirable that they should know, many artful and insidious declarations are made to them; which, together with all those mentioned above, the children, in spite of the address employed to prevent it, discern to be false. Thus, to quiet them for a moment, they are often taught to become liars through life.

In a similar manner, children are deceived, and corrupted, *by false promises*. They are sick, are reluctant to take medicines, are peevish and fretful, are wished by their parents to make little efforts to display their talents and accomplishments for the entertainment of visitors, and the gratification also of parental pride. To overcome their reluctance to these efforts, soothe their sufferings, and to quiet their fretfulness, they are promised money, new clothes, the possession of toys and privileges, and particularly the privilege of going abroad. But the performance of such promises will usually occasion either trouble or expense. Very often, therefore, they are not performed. In this work of falsehood, parents, brethren, sisters, friends, and servants, frequently all-unite; and the unfortunate children, who perfectly comprehend the deceit, find sometimes the whole, and sometimes a part of the family thus combined for their destruction.

Equally unhappy are they in *the examples which they find abroad*. Children thus corrupted carry the miserable contagion to school. All their companions who have been educated with happier care, and under better examples, are here exposed to the disease; and in many instances become infected and leprous through life.

At the same time, *children are often permitted to frequent places to which vile and unprincipled persons resort*, and there become witnesses of all their abominable sentiments and conduct. Here lies are not only told, but are made the subjects of jest and diversion. Successful falsehoods and impositions are not only repeated, but repeated with explanations, merriment, and triumph, and exhibited as proofs of superior address, and honourable ingenuity. What child can fail of corruption in such haunts of sin, and amid such examples of villany!

2. *Children are taught to lie by influence.*

In very early life children discover a strong tendency to talk abundantly, to repeat marvellous stories, to rehearse private history, and to recount the little occurrences of the neighbourhood. 'In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.' Every tendency to loquacity ought therefore to be vigorously repressed. The disposition to recite marvellous stories, to give characters, and to recount private history, and the occurrences of the neighbourhood, increases by every indulgence, and soon becomes both habitual and enormous.

Instead of checking these propensities, however, no small number of parents, unaware of the danger, and forgetful of their duty, directly listen, and inquire, and in many instances repeat what has been said in this manner by their children. In this conduct the children perceive that they derive consequence in the parental eye, from the fact that they utter things of this nature; and are efficaciously taught, that what they have said, instead of being criminal, odious, and disgraceful, is right and pleasing. They are naturally and powerfully led, therefore to im-

crease, instead of slackening, their efforts, and to multiply their tales of these unfortunate kinds. From repeating, they go on to exaggerating; from rehearsing to inventing; and from inventing such parts as the memory does not supply, to inventing the whole. In this manner they become, after no great length of time, absolute liars.

In multitudes of instances also children, to gain favourite objects and interesting compliances from their companions, are induced to *make promises* of various kinds. These afterward they are often disinclined to fulfil. The parent, whose duty it is to compel the performance, finding the child reluctant, because it involves some sacrifice of his playthings, his property, or his convenience, neglects his duty, and suffers the promise to go unfulfilled. In this manner he gives his own sanction to a direct breach of faith, infinitely more mischievous to the child than the loss of all the gratifications which he ever possessed. Nay, in some instances the child is even encouraged, and in some directly, commanded, not to fulfil his promise; because, perhaps, the fulfilment will be very painful to the child, or in some degree inconvenient to the parent. In all such cases as I have mentioned, nothing can be expected, but that the child should grow up without truth, and of course without any moral principle.

3. *Children are often driven to falsehood by passion.*

There are parents whose whole life is an almost continual scene of passion. There are others, who often break out into paroxysms of rage. Among these, the number is not small of those who exercise this furious spirit towards their children; not unfrequently because their faults, whether real or supposed, disturb their own quiet, and make, or seem to make, it necessary for them to undertake, what they equally hate and dread, the task of parental discipline. The unhappy children are in such cases commonly assailed with the looks and language of a fury, instead of those of a Christian parent. Terrified at this storm of wrath and rage, the children are in a sense

compelled, under the influence of the severest threatenings, to lie, in order to conceal their faults, and escape the dreadful infliction. Passion manifested towards children, whatever may have been their transgressions, is madness, shameful to the parent, and ruinous to the child. The parent who exercises it can expect nothing but that his child should become a liar.

4. Children are often forced to lie by punishment.

Parents, in many instances, feel satisfied that they have done their duty, when they have corrected their children for this crime. Accordingly, as often as the children repeat the crime, they repeat the punishment. Hardly any mistake with respect to the government of children can be more unhappy than this. So far as my own experience may be relied on, the same punishment can never be safely repeated in any great number of instances for the same fault. Usually, when administered once, if administered wisely, it will produce its whole efficacy on the child. All the supernumerary inflictions appear ordinarily to terminate in hardening the child; and, so far as my observation extends, in no case more effectually than in that of lying. Perhaps the rod is oftener used for the purpose of extirpating this fault than any other; and in no case, I suspect, with smaller success. The propriety and usefulness of correction, at early periods of childhood, are sanctioned by abundant experience, and by God himself. But reiterated correction, I mean often reiterated, has, I believe, rarely cured a child of falsehood; while it has confirmed multitudes in this sin beyond every rational hope of reformation.

The consciousness of having been often corrected, produces of course, in the mind of every child who is the subject of this discipline, an habitual sense of degradation. A sense of degradation is more nearly allied than mankind are usually aware to hardness of heart. When punishment fails of producing repentance, it is commonly followed by indifference to the crime; often by a determination to repeat it.

and usually by feelings of revenge towards the author of the infliction. A child has told a lie. The parent has been provoked by it; the child has been corrected, but has not become a penitent: on the contrary, he feels that he has been injured; and, instead of regarding the lie as a crime, considers it only as an unfortunate cause of his own suffering. The turpitude of the act is therefore forgotten, and lost in the sense of suffering. To retribute the abuse will naturally seem, in this case, a gratification of no contemptible importance. A new crime is therefore committed, as soon as his own safety will permit. He is accused of it; and a new lie is told, to shield him from another correction. In this manner, he will soon begin to believe that both his lies and his other crimes are merely a balance for a given measure of punishment; and will calculate how many blows it will be prudent to hazard for the pleasure of committing a fault, and the convenience of telling a lie. The parent who governs his child in this manner, takes in my opinion well directed measures to make him a villain.

SERMON CXXVII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

MISCHIEFS AND PREVENTIVES OF LYING

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
 EXOD. XX. 16.

In the preceding Discourse I proposed to consider

The nature,

The causes,

The mischiefs, and

The preventives of lying.

The two first of these subjects I discussed at that time. I shall now proceed to discuss the two last.

The first mischief of lying is the great and general one, that it is a sin against God.

There have not been wanting persons in every age, who have holden the doctrine, that *lying is in some cases lawful*. Among these have been many professed moralists, and at least some divines. Particularly, the very respectable writer, whose opinions I have several times questioned, Archdeacon Paley, has taught this doctrine in form in his system of Moral Philosophy. At the head of these men we find the celebrated name of Origen. This father, with an indistinctness of discernment, which characterizes not a small number of early writers in the Christian church, as well as most others at the same period, appears to have believed, that a falsehood might be lawfully told in order to promote the cause of Christianity. This scheme, universally extended, is no other than the fundamental and detestable maxim of illuminism, *that the end sanctions the means*, a maxim on which St. Paul has pronounced a terrible sentence of condemnation; while common sense and common honesty subjoin the united Amen.

Dr. Paley, who strongly reprobates the doctrine of Origen, has, in my opinion, fallen into an error as really, though not so extensively, mischievous. He declares 'those falsehoods, where the person to whom you speak, has *no right* to know the truth; or, more properly, where little or no *inconveniency* results from the want of confidence, in such cases, not to be lies; that is, not to be *criminal falsehoods*. The instances by which he illustrates the doctrine, are those of *madmen*, and *robbers*: persons, who, in the cases supposed, have no right to know the truth; and to deceive whom, he remarks, in these cases, will either very little, or not at all, injure the confidence of mankind.

This is one, among various other unhappy specimens of the unhappy influence of the rule, prescribed by Dr. Paley, for directing the moral conduct of men; viz. *that the rectitude of our moral actions is to be measured by their expediency or utility*. That utility

is the *foundation* of virtue has, it is believed, been sufficiently shewn in a former Discourse. That it cannot be the *criterion* of virtue has also, if I mistake not, been proved to be equally certain. Indeed, nothing is more evident, than that the moral actions of beings who cannot possibly know what their consequences will be, cannot be safely directed by those consequences. In the present case, however, Dr. Paley's own doctrine will refute his position. His declaration is, 'Falsehoods are not lies, where the person, to whom you speak, has no right to know the truth; or more properly, where little or no inconvenience results from the want of confidence: in such cases, as where you tell a falsehood to a madman for his own advantage; to a robber, to conceal your property; to an assassin, to defeat, or to divert, him for his purpose. In each of those cases,' the author says, 'the particular good consequence will overbalance the general evil consequence;' and thence he concludes the falsehood to be lawful.

Two cases are here stated, in which a wilful falsehood is pronounced to be lawful. One is that in which the person in question *has no right to know the truth*. The other, *when little or no inconvenience will result from the falsehood*.

On the first of these I observe, that the person who is to utter the falsehood, or the truth, in the case supposed, is always to determine whether the person to whom he speaks, has a right to know the truth or not. This determination also is ever to be made under the influence of such passions and biasses as may then happen to operate. It is impossible that the decision should fail, at least in most cases, of being a prejudiced, and therefore an unsound, one. The person who is entangled with a madman, or assailed by a robber, or an assassin, must at the time be a very imperfect moralist; and in a very improper situation to decide justly concerning a question of this nicety and importance. What is true in this case, is equally true of an infinity of others. Passion and prejudice would operate boundlessly on this sub-

ject, in the ordinary course of human affairs ; and, wherever they operated, would control. On this very principle it has been decided by the Romish church, that it is lawful to lie to Huguenots ; because Huguenots are such enemies to God, as to have no right to know the truth : a doctrine which has probably done more towards corrupting that church, than any, perhaps than all, the enormous errors by which it has been disgraced. The consequence, as may be easily seen in the history of this very fact, would soon be, that few or none of those with whom we had intercourse after this doctrine had become general, would in our view have a right to know the truth.

That there are persons who, in certain cases, have not a right to know the truth from *us*, I readily grant. But it will be difficult to shew, that we have a right to utter falsehoods to *them*, any more than to *others*. We may lawfully be silent in many cases ; we may lawfully conceal the truth ; but we can in no case be justified in uttering a wilful falsehood.

With regard to the other rule of Dr. Paley, *that voluntary falsehoods cease to be lies, when very little inconvenience will result from the want of confidence which follows them* ; I observe, that it is even more unhappy than the other. The degree of *inconvenience* which in this case will result to *others*, will always be estimated by comparing it with the *convenience* which the falsehood will promise to *ourselves*. The convenience which will overcome the natural repugnance of conscience to wilful falsehood must, *for the time*, be felt to be considerable. In a comparison with a considerable convenience of our own, an inconvenience, experienced either wholly, or at least chiefly, by others, will naturally be regarded as inconsiderable. In almost all instances, therefore, to use the words of Dr. Paley, ‘ little or no inconvenience will result from the falsehood,’ in the view of him who is to utter it, and who makes this comparison. Of course, in almost all instances, the falsehood will be uttered.

But when a man has once accustomed himself to

utter falsehood so long as to render the practice familiar, all that apprehensiveness of guilt, that ready susceptibility of alarm at the appearance of criminality, which constitutes the chief safety of man in the moment of temptation, will be extinguished. The mind will be no longer agitated at the thought of sin, nor awake to the sense of danger. In this situation, the convenience of uttering falsehood to ourselves will always be great; and the inconvenience which will result to others will always be small. He who has uttered the first falsehood under the influence of ten degrees of temptation, will as readily utter the second under the influence of eight; the third, of six; the fourth, of four; the fifth, of two; and the sixth without any temptation at all. The obliquity of his judgment will now prevent him from discerning that others suffer any inconvenience from his conduct. In this manner any man living may easily become in a short time a confirmed liar.

Thus the adoption of either of these rules, and still more of both of them, will prove a complete destruction of that confidence without which society cannot exist. I need not say, that this evil would more than counterbalance all the good which a licentious imagination has ever supposed, or can suppose, to be capable of resulting from all possible falsehoods, in a degree which no numbers can estimate, and no finite mind conceive. Utility itself therefore absolutely forbids the adoption of these rules.

But this view of the subject is imperfect, and so far erroneous. The old distinction of crimes into what are styled by jurists, *mala in se*, and *mala prohibita*, is entirely just, as well as incalculably important. The *mala in se*, are those which are absolutely forbidden by God; because they are universally noxious to the intelligent creation, and universally dishonourable to the Creator. He who sees from the beginning to the end, and discerns all the possible consequences of all moral conduct, has thus pronounced them to be universally malignant in their

influence on intelligent beings. *Mala prohibita*, are such evils as are *forbidden in certain circumstances*, which render them evils ; or for the *accomplishment of certain useful purposes*, which could not otherwise be so well accomplished. These, in the ordinary state of things would be matters of indifference ; and, unless prohibited, would either not be, or not be known to be evils. Such, for example, was the eating of unclean meats ; the assumption of the priest's office by those who were not descendants of Aaron ; and many others, found in the Jewish law.

Lying is a pre-eminent evil of the *former class*. Accordingly, *it is absolutely forbidden by God*. The proof, that it is such an evil, furnished in the Discourse on the nature and importance of truth and veracity (the first delivered on the text) is, if I mistake not, complete. Truth, and the utterance of it, were there shewn to be the foundation of all society, and the basis of all virtue and happiness. If this be admitted, lying is plainly a radical evil, threatening the very existence of the divine glory, and the whole interest of the intelligent universe. In the Scriptures it is unconditionally forbidden, deeply censured, and terribly threatened. ' Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie,' God hath said, ' shall in nowise enter into the heavenly city ; but shall have his part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone.' Lying then is in this respect infinitely mischievous ; as peculiarly provoking the anger of God, and being eminently the means of eternal woe. It is to be remembered that the Scriptures nowhere relax on this subject, furnish no indulgence to the practice, contain not a single hint that lying can ever be lawful, and are absolutely silent concerning that want of right to know the truth, and that smallness of inconvenience resulting from falsehood, which will make a falsehood wilfully uttered cease to be a lie.

The case is often put, that *a lie may save one's own life, or the lives of others*. The objection involved in this case is answered in many forms by the Scriptures. St. Paul declares, that the ' condemnation'

of those who only 'reported' that he and his companions taught the doctrine of 'doing evil, that good might come,' was 'just.' What would he have said of those who themselves taught this doctrine? But lying to save life is doing evil that good may come. Let no man think this a hard case. Christ has repeatedly told us, that 'he who will save his life,' by violating his duty, 'shall lose it;' and *that* 'he who shall lose his life for his sake,' that is, by doing his duty, 'shall find it' in the heavens. With this declaration in view, no man it is presumed will think himself required to utter a lie for the sake of saving his life. Had the apostles and the martyrs thought proper to lie, they might not only have saved their lives, but avoided also all the horrors and sufferings of malignant persecution.

It has been alleged, and supposed to afford some degree of countenance to this sin, that it was committed by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and some other saints of ancient times. Without attempting to determine how far the faults of these good men may have been diminished by their imperfectly critical acquaintance with the proper nature of moral conduct, I shall answer the allegation by this question only: Will your sin be lessened, or fail of being punished, because the same sin was committed by a patriarch?

2. *Lying produces incomprehensible mischiefs to the public concerns of nations.*

All good government, as I have heretofore observed, is founded in confidence; and all oppressive government in force, or fraud. Governments constitutionally free resort invariably to fraud whenever they wish to oppress. Even despotism itself is compelled universally to the same resort, and is afraid and unwilling to rely on mere physical strength for the accomplishment of its tyrannical designs. It has recourse therefore to an uninterrupted series of art and management to ensure the submission of its subjects. Of this management, deceit is not merely the chief, but, in a sense, the only means. All tyrants

lie, and lie unceasingly. All their subordinate agents are abandoned liars. Were the tyrant himself, and the instruments of his tyranny, to lay aside their deception, the tyranny would tumble to the ground.

If the rulers of a nation possessing liberty were invariably to utter truth, it would be impossible that the government should not be well administered. Should such rulers form evil designs against public or private happiness, an honest disclosure of their purposes would defeat them of course. This every ruler who forms such designs knows perfectly well; and therefore he artfully misrepresents, or studiously conceals, them. But no design of any extent can be executed without a disclosure to all those who are necessarily employed in the execution. Were *these* men of integrity, they would disclose it, of course, to the public. Such men therefore are never voluntarily employed by rulers to accomplish evil designs. Men of falsehood are invariably sought for such purposes, and invariably employed in accomplishing them.

The person who has not read political history with an eye to this subject, is an incompetent judge of the immense extent to which falsehood is employed for the purpose of oppression, and of the innumerable forms in which it has been played off upon the unhappy race of men for their destruction. Art and trick, pretence and sophistry, false declarations and false promises, have ever been a more formidable host of enemies to public liberty, safety, and happiness, than the sword and the musket, the dungeon and the gibbet. Falsehood has ever been the mine by which the enemies of freedom have blown up her citadel, and buried her votaries in the ruins. Falsehood ruined the freedom of Greece and Rome, and overturned all the republics of modern Europe. Without this terrible engine, the Romish hierarchy would never have raised its head to heaven, nor trodden down in the dust the suffering nations of men. Without this tremendous assistant, the French

republic would never have sprung into existence, nor offered up half Europe as a holocaust to the powers of darkness. Banish falsehood from the world, and you will redeem it from three-fourths of its sins, and from almost all its sufferings.

Nations have in most cases eagerly watched against the intrusions of power, and the establishment of internal force. So far they have acted wisely. But, without the aid of falsehood, no force, beside that of a foreign conqueror, ever destroyed public liberty. Against this enemy they ought to watch with the eyes of Argus ; a creeping, serpentine enemy, advancing silently and imperceptibly, equally unseen and unsuspected. If they were willing to become wise by the miserable experience of those who have gone before them, they would know, that their supreme danger lies here ; that every ruler who flatters them, that every demagogue, is a liar ; that he deceives them for his own advantage, not for theirs ; for the overthrow of their liberty, not for its establishment ; for the ruin of their interests, not for their peace, prosperity, or safety.

‘ If a ruler hearken to lies,’ says Solomon, ‘ all his servants are wicked.’—‘ Judgment,’ saith the prophet Isaiah, ‘ is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off.’ What was the source of these calamities ? Let the prophet himself answer : ‘ Truth is fallen in the streets, and therefore equity cannot enter.’ It is the glorious character of Him, whose dominion ‘ is as the light of the morning, of a morning without clouds, and as the clear shining of the sun after rain upon the tender herb of the field,’ that ‘ He shall judge the people with truth.’ It is a divine characteristic of the Infinite Ruler, that ‘ his paths are mercy and truth.’ Such must be the character of earthly rulers, if they would be ‘ ministers of God, for good,’ or if their subjects are to be either safe or happy.

But we need not appeal to a numerous train of scriptural texts for instruction on this subject. In Psal. cxliv. there is the strongest, and perhaps the

most comprehensive exhibition of its importance, which can be found even in the scriptural pages, and which ever will be found in the language of men. In this portion of the sacred canon, David, contemplating the wars in which he had been, and more probably those in which he was at that very time engaged ; remembering the usual care and good providence of God, exercised towards him in his contests with his enemies ; and feeling, that this was amply sufficient for his safety and success in every case of hostility waged by open force ; breaks out in a joyful song of exultation for these blessings, as already partly received, and as partly secured to him for the time to come : ‘ Blessed be Jehovah, my strength, who teaches my hand to war, and my fingers to fight ; my goodness, and my fortress, my high tower, and my deliverer, my shield, and he in whom I trust ; who subdueth my people under me.’

After some short reflections on the humble and undeserving character of man, naturally excited by the contemplation of these mercies, he turns his eye to the state of his own kingdom, probably convulsed at that time by Absalom ; a rebellion generated and supported by falsehood ; he exclaims, ‘ Bow thy heavens, O Jehovah, and come down ; touch the mountains, and they shall smoke : cast forth lightning, and scatter them ; shoot out thine arrows, and destroy them : send thine hand from above ; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children ; whose mouth speaketh vanity (that is, lies), and their right hand is a hand of falsehood.’ To this great man the ordinary blessings of God’s providence to him and his people, appeared a defence amply sufficient, and sources of victory sure and abundant, against the violence of war, and enemies in arms. But, when he came to consider the danger which threatened his government and nation from the insidious attacks of deception, he felt that a new and singular interference of God was necessary for the deliverance of himself and his people. Then it became necessary that God

should 'bow the heavens and come down;' that he should set the mountains on fire; that he should cast forth his lightning, to scatter, and shoot out his arrows, to destroy,' these children of falsehood. Such, in his view, was the danger to the people of Israel from the deceptions practised upon them, that nothing less than these wonderful exertions of divine power would ensure their safety.

At the same time, he informs us in the strongest terms, that a deliverance from this terrible kind of warfare, from the spirit which generated it, and from the persons by whom it was carried on, was indispensable to the internal prosperity of the nation, both moral and secular. 'Rid me,' he exclaims again, 'and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh lies, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood: that our sons may be as plants, grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace; that our garners may be full, affording all manner of store; that our sheep may bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our streets; that our oxen may be strong to labour; that there be no breaking in, nor going out; that there be no complaining in our streets. Happy,' he subjoins, 'is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is Jehovah.'

These are blessings which cannot be found in a nation among whom falsehood prevails. There men will not labour to produce them; there God will not give them. They are blessings which truth leads in her train; blessings which God showers upon a people who love truth. But at the approach of falsehood they shrink, languish, and expire.

All this, it is to be remembered, was written by David, one of the greatest and wisest men whom the world has ever seen. He knew by experience every danger from war; from open enemies, embodied in powerful armies. By the same experience he was perfectly acquainted also with the evils which spring from falsehood. The evils of the latter

class he perceived, by actual trial, to be immensely greater than those of the former. In these observations he has barely told us what passed under his own eye, and constituted his own case. Nay, more, he has told all this directly to his Maker; and in a psalm addressed directly to him, has poured forth the praises which he esteemed due, and prayed for the assistance which he deemed necessary. In these circumstances the sincerity of the suppliant cannot be questioned.

But it is farther to be remembered, that this psalm was dictated by the inspiration of God. It is all therefore, exactly just and true. Nothing is diminished; nothing is exaggerated. Falsehood is just so much more dangerous, in the ordinary circumstances of mankind, than war; its evils are just so much more terrible; and peculiar interpositions of God, to deliver mankind from their efficacy, are in this very manner indispensable. Truth also is accompanied and followed by all these blessings; blessings which, fairly understood, involve the whole prosperity of a people. At the same time, falsehood either prevents or destroys them all; or, in other words, ruins the nation in which it prevails.

3. *Falsehood is equally pernicious to the private interests of mankind.*

A great proportion of all their miscarriages in the pursuit of happiness, are suffered by mankind from *intentional misinformation only*. A man is falsely informed of the state of the markets, and conveys his property to a ruinous sale. He wishes to employ an agent, to manage his business, to instruct his children, or to plead his cause. He wishes to employ a physician to attend his family in cases of sickness, or a clergyman to preach for himself and his neighbours. The character of each of these men is represented to him falsely. Of consequence, his business is mismanaged, his children are half-taught, his cause is lost by ignorance or treachery, his family are hastened to the grave by an empiric, and himself and his neighbours, by false exhibitions of the

are led to perdition. The beggar cheats him by a false tale of woe. The false friend betrays his interests, and his secrets. A false witness swears away his rights ; and a false judge perverts the law to his ruin. A flatterer deceives himself into fatal apprehensions concerning his own excellences. A censor breaks his spirits by unfounded and malignant representations of his defects ; and a sophist cheats him out of truth, virtue, and heaven. The frauds practised on our fellow-men, which were either recited or alluded to in a preceding Discourse on that subject, are all perpetrated by the instrumentality of falsehood. This harpy seizes on every human enjoyment, and on every human interest ; destroys whatever is in her power ; and pollutes and distresses wherever she is unable to destroy.

4. *Equally pernicious is falsehood to the personal interests of the liar himself.*

The importance of this truth will appear in the following particulars :—

(1.) *Lying is always followed by reproaches of conscience.*

Mankind, with a single voice, have pronounced lying to be a gross and enormous sin. This is the dictate of every other religion, and every other law, as well as of the law and the religion of God. To this universal testimony, the conscience of every individual unites its own solemn accord ; and, whenever a lie is uttered, proclaims the guilt of the criminal with an affecting and awful voice. At the sound of this remonstrance, the soul trembles and shrinks, and before the bar of this severe judge is compelled to plead guilty, without a hope of escape.

Nor is it compelled only to acknowledge its guilt, but also clearly to see and deeply to feel its peculiar debasement. A liar is obliged irresistibly to feel that he is sunk below the level of men. His mind is a house of pollution ; a haunt of every despicable purpose, and every degrading thought. Thus his character, as seen by himself, lies upon him like ‘ a heavy burden, too grievous to be borne ;’ a load which he

can neither carry, nor lay down.

In the mean time, conscience, faithful to her office, holds up to his view, in terrible forebodings, the anger of God against lying lips, and presents to him alarming anticipations of the dreadful account which he will be obliged to give at the future judgment. Such, I mean, is the fact, unless, through the want of a religious education, he is destitute of moral principle; or, by a repetition of crimes, his 'conscience has been seared, as with a hot iron.'

(2.) *The liar is continually tormented by the fear of detection.*

A liar is never safe. It is so much the interest of mankind to expose this crime, and it is so often actually exposed, that the danger is always great, and always felt by the criminal. Should a detection take place, the consequences he knows must be distressing. The shame, the hatred, the contempt, and the punishment, which in this case will arrest him, he knows not how to meet with a steady eye. His terrified mind is therefore in a perpetual alarm, and sees these evils always at the door. The 'path' of life, therefore, is to him 'a hedge of thorns.'

(3.) *Should he be detected, as he invariably will be, he is compelled to suffer many excruciating evils.*

Particularly, he is necessitated to invent many falsehoods, to gain the object, or prevent the evils of one.

Truth is always plain and consistent: the highway, in which the 'way-faring man, though a fool, need not err.' Falsehood is a bye-path; crooked, perplexed, and blind; in which every traveller is soon bewildered and lost. No liar can possibly foresee either the nature or the number of the difficulties into which he will plunge himself by a single lie. These difficulties he will often feel himself compelled to obviate by such means as are in his power. Usually no other means will offer themselves to him for this purpose beside a succession of lies. Thus, one falsehood, in a sense necessarily, draws after it another, and another. Nor is any mind which begins

this course sufficiently comprehensive to know where it will end.

Those whom he has deceived also will often resent and often severely revenge the abuse. In one manner and another he is not unfrequently punished with severity. Always he is disgraced, reproached, stung with contempt, and insulted with derision. Decent men shun his company. Parents warn their children to beware of him. The finger of scorn points him out, the hiss of infamy follows him in the street. Even villains of most other sorts feel themselves superior to him.

His reputation, of course, is lost. Those whom he has deceived, will take sure and exemplary vengeance in publishing the deception to the world. His rivals will trumpet it, to rise above him; his kindred villains, to turn the eyes of mankind from their own guilt. Should they even be silent, he will disclose it himself. The safety and success which he has found in uttering one falsehood, will imbolden him to utter another, and another, until he is detected. When this is done, he sinks speedily into absolute contempt. The proverb, 'Once a liar and always a liar,' will meet him as a label, from every mouth in the street.

In this character all persons will feel themselves to be his superiors, and will take effectual care to announce this superiority. The tongues of multitudes will proclaim it in the most stinging terms. The eyes of more will look down upon him with haughtiness and scorn; while the conduct of all will attest his degradation with a visible mixture of pity and abhorrence. Of course, he will be obliged to feel, as well as to appear, only in the character of a mean, debased wretch, inferior to his kind; and to act an under, servile part in every scene of life. He can maintain no cause, assert no fact, make no promise, face no man, and meet no eye; but is forced to falter and fall even before those with whom he would once have disdained to acknowledge an acquaintance.

As he loses all confidence, he loses with it every opportunity of acquiring useful and reputable employ-

ment. None will trust him with their property; none will commit to him their business; because all will expect to be rewarded by him with baseness and treachery.

But all men are dependant on their fellow-men. Peculiarly is this true of those who are young. Every youth is necessitated to lean, in no small degree, on those who are already in possession of the great business of mankind. Veracity to them is the door to confidence; confidence to useful employment; and useful employment to property, reputation, influence, and a prosperous and useful life. This door the liar has voluntarily shut against himself; and can be admitted neither to the good offices, nor even to the company, of those on whom he chiefly depends, under God, for every worldly blessing.

Thus he involves himself in innumerable distresses, and exposes himself to innumerable temptations. He is poor almost of course. Honest poverty is always and most deservedly respectable. But poverty which grows out of vice ensures contempt and abhorrence, and is encircled by numberless temptations which honest poverty never knew. I have already observed, that the liar is almost irresistibly prompted to a succession of falsehoods, in order to escape the dangers of the first. To these he is strongly solicited to add perjury; to corrupt others, that he may countenance himself; to cheat, that he may acquire what he cannot gain by lying; and to steal, that he may possess himself of what he cannot gain by cheating.

All these scandalous vices are soon fixed into habits; and these habits every day acquire new accessions of strength. His declension therefore is rapid and dreadful. From the company, conversation, and example of good men, indulged more or less to most sinners, he is excluded of course. Virtue may pity, but cannot consort with him. His touch is contagious; and his very breath carries infection with it wherever he goes. By this exclusion, he loses a blessing of more value than all the good which falsehood ever sought or found.

In this manner he goes on, hardening his heart, and polluting his life. His conscience becomes seared; and sooner than he could have originally mistrusted, he is given over to a reprobate mind. In the end, he dies a bitter death; and closes a shameful, wretched life with a miserable eternity.

The *preventives* of this deplorable vice may be advantageously considered as they respect *children under the education of their parents*, and *persons arrived at years of discretion*.

The foundation of all moral good is best laid in childhood. This season therefore is to be regarded as of supreme importance, and husbanded for this great purpose with supreme solicitude. I shall address my observations on this subject directly to parents. To accomplish this invaluable end, so indispensable to the present and eternal welfare of your children,

1. *Teach them always to speak truth, by precept and example.*

Inculcate on them, from the moment in which they are able to speak at all, and inculcate daily, the immense importance of speaking truth. Truth is so much more easily and so much more naturally spoken than falsehood, that children usually speak truth of course. Facts always present it, the mind always perceives it, the tongue always utters it, without effort or contrivance. Falsehood, on the contrary, must ever be invented, and continually laboured into existence. Before this labour has commenced, truth must be effectually impressed on the conscience, and instamped on the heart.

Teach them, that veracity is inestimably useful; that it will make them loved, trusted, honoured, and befriended; and will save them from shame, neglect, reproach, and poverty, from extreme humiliation, and the terrors of a condemning conscience. Teach them, that lying will prevent all these blessings, and entail upon them all these sufferings; that it will wither their reputation, their comforts, and their hopes, that, deformed with this sin, they will be

pitied by every good, and insulted by every bad man; that their enemies will tread them under foot, while their friends cannot protect them; and that their character, when once habitually blackened by falsehood, can never be made white again.

Teach them, that every equivocal, every prevaricating, every evasive expression, every thing which partakes of duplicity, is radically a lie; and that, if they indulge themselves in these humbler efforts of falsehood, they will soon sink to the lowest degradations of villany.

Teach them, that the eternal God, the God of truth, to whom 'lying lips are an abomination,' hears, marks, and records every thing which they speak; and that this record will be the foundation of their final sentence at the great day.

Discourage in them, at all times, a propensity to idle talk, to story-telling, particularly to the telling of marvellous stories, the recital of private history, the news of the neighbourhood, and the giving of characters. Lead them carefully, whenever they converse concerning others, to such conversation, and such only as is prudent and kind; and accustom them to feel that, when they cannot speak of others in this manner, it is usually both their duty and their interest not to speak at all. Teach them faithfully to keep, and never to betray, the secrets intrusted to them; and effectually repress in them a disposition to pry into the personal and domestic concerns of others.

What you thus communicate by your instruction, endeavour to complete by your example. Shew on all occasions the most solemn and the most intense regard to truth. Speak truth to them exactly, on every occasion, whether in earnest or in jest. Promise them nothing which you do not faithfully resolve to fulfil. Fulfil faithfully all that you promise, however difficult or inconvenient may be the fulfilment. If at any time and by any circumstances they are led to suppose that you have failed to perform your promise exactly, or if the performance has at any time

subsequent to the promise become unlawful or impossible, carefully remove every suspicion which they may entertain concerning your veracity, by a diligent explanation of every doubtful or unknown circumstance; and shew them that your conduct has been strictly conformed to the rigid dictates of truth.

At the same time, oblige them to fulfil all their own promises, however self-denying the fulfilment may be to them, and however expensive or troublesome to you. This discipline will, ere long, teach them not to promise rashly, and to regard every promise which they make, as sacred and unalterable.

Universally, make the establishment of an unwarping veracity in their minds, a prime and ever-present object of your parental labours; and, until this object is accomplished, devote to it the energy of your minds, and the efforts of your lives.

2. *Prevent them from keeping company with deceitful persons.*

Forbid them *absolutely* to consort with those who are known to be of this character. Restrain them from every place frequented by such persons; from taverns, from public corners, from horse-races, and universally from every lounging, idle resort. The plague is usually taken by infection. He therefore who is on healthy ground will be safe. Suffer your children then, on no occasion, to become the companions of loose, immoral persons. Of them your children will learn to lie, of course; and that, however faithful may be your instructions, and however unspotted your example. Remember yourselves and teach them, that the 'companion of fools shall be destroyed.'

3. *If your children are at any time guilty of deceit endeavour by the best means in your power, to prevent every future transgression of the same nature.*

Rehearse to them solemnly and kindly all the interesting considerations which I have mentioned, and every other useful thought which your own minds

may suggest. Present to them, particularly, clear, affecting views of their guilt and their danger; and forcibly exhibit to them the ruinous efficacy of falsehood on every interest of time and eternity. If the transgression demands a punishment, never administer it in a passion. Delay the administration, not only until you are free from every resentful emotion, but until you are secure of preserving your equanimity in spite of any incidental provocation, and are absolutely collected and self-controlled. In this state of mind, accompany the discipline with solemn instructions, calm reproofs, and affectionate testimonies of the mingled pain and pity with which you regard the guilty transaction.

If one punishment, if (for example) correction, fails of producing a reformation, vary your inflictions successively through the several modes of discipline, until you have gained the object. Shame or confinement will often accomplish what correction cannot. If these prove ineffectual, the denial of favourite indulgences, and the deprivation of customary privileges, will often produce reformation. A string may almost always be struck, which will accord with the state of the heart; an effort made which will ensure a victory.

In the mean time, if your child is charged with some other fault, and frankly tells the truth concerning it, remit either the whole or a part of the punishment due to his crime, discretionally, as a high value which you place upon his veracity.

4. *Commend them to the constant care and blessing of God.*

‘Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain.’ As God alone *can* preserve them, so, if you ask him in earnest, you have every reason to hope that he *will*.

I shall now address the subject to all such persons as have arrived at that period of life in which they are capable of taking some useful care of themselves. To such persons the following directions may be the means of guarding against this fatal evil.—

1. *Watch faithfully &c your speech.*

Consider before you speak, whether what you are about to say is true, right, kind, and useful: or false, unkind, and mischievous; and determine to utter nothing, until you are satisfied. Steadily resist propensity to talk much, remembering that 'in a multitude of words there wanteth not sin:' and never speak at all, unless some good purpose be answered; unless some useful information be given; some innocent pleasure communicated; or some other lawful end accomplished.

Resist a disposition to give characters; to recite family news; to expose private failings; and to ridicule personal imperfections. Ask yourselves whether you would be willing that your own failings should be published, repeated, and ridiculed. Remember, that others thus attacked will feel as you would feel; and that, as you would resent such a base intrusion upon your peace, so they, when in the same manner wounded by you, will become your enemies; and will sooner or later find an opportunity of making you feel their resentment. Remember farther, that even those who hear and applaud what you say, may yet, and often do, despise you for saying it; that they will ever afterward regard you with suspicion, shun you as dangerous to their safety, and characterize you as nuisances to society. In this manner, before you are aware, your characters will become odious, and your reputation be lost.

When you repeat any thing, strive to repeat it exactly. Neither enhance nor lessen. Colour nothing beyond the strict truth. Recite that, and that only, which you believe; and express no more confidence in what you recite than you really feel. Recite also so much of the circumstances, drift, and tendency of the transaction which is your subject, as fairly to explain its true nature, and the real character and conduct of those who were concerned.

Refrain from speaking when you are in a passion. All passionate words are dangerous and sinful. The wisest and most guarded persons, when provoked,

utter at times things which they regret ever afterward. Moses, the meekest of all men, when provoked at Meribah, 'spoke unadvisedly with his lips;' and was forbidden to enter the land of promise.

Guard especially against making promises in a passion. Such promises will often involve you in serious difficulties; and prove snares and traps to your feet. You will feel a strong reluctance to fulfil, and powerful temptations to break, them: temptations, which frequently overcome vigorous resolutions, subvert established reputation, and lead their miserable victims fatally astray.

Many persons, and youths more than almost any others, are prone to make rash and inconsiderate promises. Few propensities are more unhappy than this, or conduct men to more bitter consequences. Universally resolve to make no promise when it can fairly be avoided. When it cannot, guard it with such conditions as shall render it certainly safe. Consider, particularly whether you possess the means of a faithful performance; if not, make no promises. In this manner you will escape the most dangerous temptations to falsehood, and the most alarming exposures to shame and ruin.

2. *Fix in your minds the most solemn resolutions to speak truth only.*

Call to mind daily the immense advantages of truth, and the immense evils of falsehood. These advantages resolve to acquire; these evils determine not to suffer. Both, to a considerable extent, have been set before you. Ponder them deeply and daily, as their importance deserves. *Determine, that no person shall ever have it in his power to charge you with falsehood.* Determine never to say any thing which shall enable your enemies to triumph, or force your friends to blush; to say nothing, which you would be ashamed to have recorded of you; nothing, which shall forbid you to look an honest man in the face; nothing, which in the presence of such a man shall force your eyes when they meet his, to labour, linger, and fall.

Resolve firmly never to flatter any man. Speak that which is good of others when you can ; and when you cannot, speak, at least in ordinary cases, nothing. Remember, that ‘ a flattering mouth worketh ruin,’ for him who flatters, as well as for him who is flattered. Be able therefore with Elihu, nobly to say, ‘ Let me not, I pray you, accept any man’s person ; neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles ; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away.’ To strengthen your resolutions, remember alway, that when you are once embarked in deceit, you are wholly afloat ; will be driven you know not whither, without either compass or pilot ; and will be environed by rocks and shoals, threatening you unceasingly with irremediable destruction.

3. *Frequent the company of wise and good men only.*

In this society you will find temptations, not spread before you, but taken away ; examples, which will not corrupt, but strengthen you in virtue. Here you will always find honour, peace, and profit ; instead of shame, anxiety, and ruin. If you will seek this society, and this only, you will be welcomed to their esteem and good offices : and will gain from their precepts and example, wisdom, truth, noble sentiments, and the most excellent conduct. These they will enforce by ten thousand motives, unthought of by licentious men, instinctively rising up to view, presented in strong lights, and exhibited with powerful persuasion. The excellency, usefulness, and glory of virtue they will unfold to you in many ways, of which loose men never entertain a thought, and of which you yourselves have probably not formed a conception. This divine object also they will commend to your adoption by the charms of an amiable, honourable, and delightful example. Their sentiments you will imbibe, even before you are aware. Their exalted spirit you will catch. Their dignified life you will make your own.

Here you will soon learn to wonder, to be astonished, that yourselves, that any being who pos-

sesses a rational mind, could ever frequent, or ever think for a moment of frequenting, the haunts of licentious men ; the scenes of profaneness, gaming, fraud, and falsehood ; where darkness spreads her funeral pall ; where oaths and obscenity, lies and blasphemies, furnish a dreadful prelude to a more enormous perpetration of the same foul sins in the world of perdition. To exchange the society which I have recommended for these haunts, would, in your own view, be to quit the splendours of a palace for the loathsome horrors of a jail ; to wander from the sweets of Eden into the gloom, the chains, and the madness of a dungeon.

4. To strengthen yourselves in all the conduct which I have recommended, *labour to fix in your minds a strong, solemn, and habitual sense of the amazing importance of speaking truth alway.*

Truth is the foundation of all virtue, and of all permanent happiness. Establish this great doctrine in your minds so, that it shall never be forgotten ; so, that it shall be a part of your whole train of thinking, and inwoven, as an habitual commanding principle, in all your conduct. Bring it home to your hearts ; and spurn at the thought of regarding it even with a momentary indifference.

Remember, that confidence is the foundation of all good ; that unless you can confide in others, you cannot live a single day with comfort, or even with safety ; that you can confide no farther than others speak truth, and fulfil promises ; and that universal distrust would to yourselves and others be universal misery ; would unhinge every expectation, and every hope ; would annihilate all the business of intelligent beings ; would set them at variance with each other, and with God ; and would make the universe a solitude and a desert.

Remember, that every human concern is decided by testimony ; that he who weakens it is an enemy to mankind, and makes havoc of human happiness. Realize, that if by influence or example you destroy or diminish the confidence of men, if you lessen the

sense of the obligations to veracity, you will become pests of the universe, and foes of every intelligent being which it contains.

Call to mind, that by falsehood you will debase yourselves beyond measure ; cut off all your hopes of becoming virtuous ; arm your conscience against your peace ; and make yourselves objects of contempt, indignation, and abhorrence.

Recollect daily, that the first step which you take in falsehood is the commencement of this boundless evil ; that the way to become an abandoned liar is to conceal truth, to equivocate, to evade, to utter sportive falsehood, to rehearse marvellous stories, to recite the tales of private history, and to colour what you recite with hues and stains mixed by yourselves. In all these things you may feel at your ease ; may profess yourselves to be, and may often actually be, in sport. So is the madman, who ' scatters fire-brands, arrows, and death.'

Remember, last of all, that the time in which your lot is cast, is pre-eminently a time in which the sense of truth is weakened, and the consciousness of moral obligation to a wonderful degree forgotten. In this day, falsehood has come forth to the public eye with her brazen front unveiled, her cheek without even a tinge, and her snaky tongue newly dipt in poison. Her professed enemies are changed into friends ; her friends into worshippers. The whole world wanders after her. Afraid no longer of the contempt of society, or the brand of public justice, she enters familiarly into the study of the philosopher, the hall of deliberation, and the palace of power ; and dictates instructions, laws, edicts, and manifestoes to nations. In her train, parties, princes, and nations are proud to be enrolled. How immense then, how unceasing, how universal, is the danger to you. Awake to that danger, and feel that you are struggling for your all.

Above all things, commit yourselves to God in prayer. Ask him, and he will make you watchful, wise, and steadfast in your duty. Ask him, and he will teach

you to love, and enable you to speak, truth only, until you arrive at that glorious world, where truth only is spoken by its happy inhabitants, and where all its blessings are realized with increasing delight, throughout ages which know no end.

SERMON CXXVIII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT. SLANDER.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
 EXOD. xx. 16.

IN the last Discourse but one, I proposed to consider falsehood under the two heads of *lying*, and *slander*.

The former of these I have discussed at length. I shall now proceed to the consideration of the latter; and shall arrange my observations under the following heads:—

I. *The nature of slander.*

II. *The modes in which it is practised.*

III. *The evils of it.*

IV. *Dissuasives from it.*

I. Slander may be thus defined: *It is that conduct which injuriously lessens or destroys another's reputation.*

In most cases, words are made the vehicle of slander. It may, however, be accomplished without words. When we are reasonably expected to give a fair character of another, we may easily and deeply slander him by our *silence*. We may also accomplish the same purpose by our *actions*; as when we withhold our countenance from a man who, in ordinary circumstances, might fairly expect to enjoy it; withdraw from him business, with which he has heretofore been intrusted; or turn him out of our service, without alleging any reasons for our conduct. In these, and the like cases, we give such proofs of suspecting him ourselves, as to entail upon him, in greater or less degrees, the suspicion of others.

Slander is perpetrated sometimes with *design*, and sometimes through *inattention*. In the former case it is perpetrated with an intention to destroy happiness ; in the latter, from indifference to it. In the former case, it springs from malice ; in the latter from that sordid insensibility to the interests of others, which is little less censurable. It will be unnecessary to distinguish them any farther.

II. Slander is most frequently practised in the following modes :—

1. *In direct and false aspersions.*

The slanderer commences this malignant employment by inventing and fabricating tales of falsehood concerning the person who is either the object of his hatred, or the subject of his diversion. To the fabricator of these tales all the subsequent mischief which arises from them is supremely chargeable.

The second step is the rehearsing of such stories after they have been told to us by others. In this step we do not participate in all the guilt which is attendant on the first. But both the guilt and the mischief are often greater. The spirit with which we rehearse tales of slander may be more malignant than that which gave birth to them ; and the consequences may be incomparably worse. The inventor may have been a thoughtless, ignorant, giddy-minded man, without consideration, and without character. We, on the contrary, may possess reputation, forecast, and a correct knowledge of human concerns, may comprehend the whole efficacy of the tale, may perceive its falsehood, and may enjoy a base pleasure in giving it the most effectual operation. Thus, although not chargeable with the guilt of fabricating falsehood, we may become much more criminal than the fabricator.

Whatever is our situation, we lend in this case our own weight to the story ; and in this manner we sometimes do all, and not unfrequently most of the mischief of which the story becomes the instrument. The inventors of such tales are usually persons of no reputation ; and, if reputable at first they soon de-

stroy their character by this very employment. Were they then disregarded, and their tales not repeated, both would sink at once into absolute contempt. But when persons of a fair character take up such stories, and soberly rehearse them, the falsehood acquires new strength, and spreads with a new and most unhappy influence. This base coin they have not indeed made ; but they have passed it, and given it a currency, which it could never have derived from the maker. Let no person then think himself at all justified in reciting a tale of slander by the very common, indeed, but very wretched excuse, dictated, and adopted only by the coarsest and most vulgar morality ; that *they heard it from others*. Guilt fastens on every traveller in this base and bye-path, and at every step in his progress.

Some persons perpetrate this iniquity with designs directly malicious. Some from a busy, meddling disposition, always unsatisfied, unless when interfering in the concerns of others ; and some from a wish to be thought extensively acquainted with private history. All these are characterized in the Scriptures by the significant names of ‘ busy bodies, and ‘ tale-bearers ;’ and are considered there, and every where else, as the disturbers and pests of society. They are characterized in the most disadvantageous manner. Lev. xix. 16, ‘ Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people ; neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour. I am the Lord.’ And again, in Prov. xxvi. 20, &c. ‘ The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds.—Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out.’ They are classed with the worst of mankind, 1 Pet. iv. 15, ‘ Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busy-body in other men’s matters.’

The character given of them in the Scriptures is the character given of them by common sense. In every age and country they have been objects of contempt and abhorrence. Prudent men have every where shunned them ; and pointed them out to their

friends and children as enemies, as gins and snares, which they were ever cautiously to spy out, and eagerly to avoid. Every company into which they enter after their character is known, feels a sudden pressure upon its thoughts, and an alarm for its peace and safety. The aspect is changed at once. The features, relaxed by ease, friendship, and confidence, are suddenly contracted and fixed. The eye quits its smile of serenity and pleasure; and settles itself in the attitude of vigilance, apprehensive and ill-boding; and the conversation, which sprang from the heart-reciprocated friendship, and awakened delight, is chilled down in a moment into general, unmeaning observations, adopted only because they have no meaning, and because no tale of mischief can be told about them. When such a man resides in a neighbourhood, a thick cloud hangs over all its enjoyments. When he removes, it is again covered with cheerfulness and sunshine.

With a criminality often greater, we slander others by giving accounts concerning them which are true. No excuse is more frequently or more confidently pleaded, as an ample justification of malignant stories concerning others, than this: that *they are true*. The author of ill-natured tales or remarks is not indeed chargeable, in this case, with the crime of falsehood. Still, he may be really and eminently criminal. If the good name of our neighbour be injured, the great evil in question is done. If it be injured by *us*, the evil is done by *us*. If we have injured it with pleasure, our malevolence is real, and therefore our guilt is real. That guilt also may be as great or greater in the eye of God, than any which even we ourselves have attributed to the inventor of a slanderous story.

Be it so, that our neighbour has slipped; and that he has sinned against God. Still, 'if his sin remain with him,' he may repent; and his repentance may render his character better, and his hopes brighter, than ours. Still, his talents may be employed for the benefit of himself, his family, and mankind. All this benefit, and all the comfort which he and his might

enjoy, we may thus prevent, and blast for ever.

My neighbour is a merchant. In a course of honest industry, he is reduced by misfortunes to failing circumstances. The fact is known to me. I publish it. His creditors, anxious to secure as far as may be their own property, seize upon his effects, and perhaps confine him in a prison. Thus he may be completely ruined by a story which I have told; and story which is true. Thus also his family are reduced to want; and see their hopes of support, education, usefulness, and comfort finally destroyed.

Had I, with the prudence and benevolence which Christianity inspires, confined this secret within my own breast, the industry of my neighbour, his skill in business, his integrity, and the credit which he had merited and gained by these qualifications, would have enabled him to continue in trade without interruption; and probably to acquire all the necessary means of comfort and prosperity for himself and his family. These blessings I have prevented; and am chargeable with the prevention. I have not, indeed, told a falsehood; but I have done mischief which is incalculable, and which a falsehood in the case supposed could not have done.

Why have I done this mischief? There was no necessity that my neighbour should be injured, that his failings should be published, that his character should be lowered, that his misfortunes should be announced to the world, that the peace of his family should be wounded, their enjoyments cut off, and their hopes blasted in the bud. In all this there is no profit to me, nor to mankind; nor, unless I am possessed of the spirit of a fiend, can there be any pleasure.

It is evident therefore, beyond debate, that he who tells a mischievous story, and that he who by declaring his belief of a mischievous story told by others lends it the credit and sanction of his own authority, are essentially and alike guilty of slander. In the conduct specified both also are without excuse.

So long as persons of reputation will either repeat the false stories of others, invented for the purpose

of lowering or destroying character, or will publish malignant truths concerning others, the peace, the good name, and the comfort of mankind will be invaded and destroyed.

2. *Slander may be practised without inventing or repeating malignant stories, whether true or false.*

(1.) This may be done *by listening to the slanderous stories of others.*

He who listens to a story of this nature without expressing his disapprobation, declares by his conduct, the strongest of all attestations, that he considers it as meriting his attention, and in some degree his belief. This belief, and even this attention, from persons of respectability, will give the slander a weight and currency which it could never have derived from the inventor. Those who see us listen in this manner will conclude of course, that the slander in our view has foundation and importance. Hence they will be induced both to believe and to report what, otherwise, they would have disregarded.

The inventor of slander derives all his consequence and all his encouragement from the countenance lent to him by others. But to believe is to countenance him: to listen is to countenance him. By listening to him therefore we give life and activity to his mischievous fabrications; and lend them most of their power to do hurt. Besides, by doing this, we keep the spirit of slander alive in his breast; and make him feel secure of the consequence which he hopes to gain by this course of conduct; the consequence which is his principal motive to sin. In this manner, we contribute to the existence of future slanders, and, in a manner possessed of no contemptible efficacy, aid the diffusion of calumny through the world. This nuisance to society, this pest to mankind, we sustain, cherish, and send abroad, to destroy the peace of those around us. How plainly is he who acts in this manner a nuisance to his fellow-men?

Both reason and revelation, both common sense and common good nature, demand, on the contrary that whenever our neighbour's character is attacked

we should appear openly in his defence. In very few ways can we so often or so greatly befriend others, as by supporting their good name; and in very few cases will our kindness be so deeply or so gratefully felt. The person thus attacked is absent of course and cannot therefore defend himself. If we do not defend him, he is left naked to the attack, and to all its malignant consequences. Our silence cannot but injure him seriously. It may be the means of his ruin. Who would not wish, in such a case, to have his own character defended? Who then is not bound to defend that of another? Were this great law of righteousness duly felt, were its injunctions, as they respect the case under consideration faithfully obeyed, what a horde of busy bodies, tale-bearers, and calumniators would be broken down! What an endless multitude of base and snaky efforts against the peace of society, and the comfort of families would in this way be crushed at once!

(2.) *If our silence, when tales of slander are reported, is thus injurious to others; the declaration, that we believe them is still more criminal.*

A multitude of persons not only suffer slander to pass without censure or opposition, but readily believe it; and without hesitation declare this belief. If they do not repeat it to others, their consciences appear to be satisfied. Even when they give it no credit, they suffer others quietly to repeat it, not only without animadversion, but without even hinting their disbelief. Through a company of such persons, a calumny rolls on without an impediment, without a single generous effort to check its progress. On the contrary, it fares like a spy in a venal, mercenary army, whom none will detect, and whose escape all will favour, because all are hollow-hearted and false. If it is attended with evidence moderately plausible, they declare their belief of it, and thus help it onward to the belief of others. If it be supported by no evidence whatever, they will not declare their disbelief of it; thus suffering it to proceed without interruption, and to gain credit wherever it may.

There is, in the human breast, a strong propensity to censoriousness. We need no instruction to teach us, that our fellow-men are by every censure which adheres to them, lowered beneath their customary level. Nor do we discern with less readiness, that whatever sinks those around us, raises comparatively ourselves. With this self-exaltation, despicable as are the means by which it is achieved, we, whenever we become the authors of it, are despicable enough to be gratified: and the gratification, base and contemptible as it is, is still eagerly sought, and highly enjoyed, by many such minds as are found in the present world.

When these persons hear the characters of other aspersed, they hear it with pleasure; and with pleasure believe the aspersion. Their faith here is not given to evidence; it does not wait for evidence. If evidence be furnished, indeed, it is so much the better, because it is expected to command the faith of others also. But no evidence is necessary to ensure the faith of these persons. The tale pleases, because it involves the degradation of a neighbour, a rival, a superior, or some other object of jealousy. It is believed, because they wish it to be true. Still, many such persons are too cautious to rehearse it again; and with their avoidance of this additional injury, their cold, heartless consciences are satisfied.

III. *The evils of slander are either personal, or public.*

1. *The personal evils of slander, by which I intend the sufferings experienced from it by individuals, are the pain felt, and the injuries derived, from the loss of a good name.*

A good name is the estimation in which we are holden by others, on account of our good qualities, and our good conduct. Such a name is declared by God himself to be 'better than precious ointment,' Eccles. vii. 1. And in Prov. xxii. 1, 'A good name is' said to be 'better than great riches; and loving-favour,' that is, the favourable emotions, exercised towards such as possess a good name, better 'than silver and gold.

Silver and gold, particularly when possessed in such accumulations as constitute 'great riches,' are, proverbially, the supreme objects which this world furnishes of human desires. As such, they are customarily used, as objects of comparison, to illustrate the value of things eminently precious. Thus, in the Scriptures themselves we are informed, that 'the law of the Lord is more to be chosen than the most fine gold.' Thus also Job says of the wisdom which is the obedience of that law, that 'it cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.'

'Precious ointment,' as intended by a Jewish writer, probably denotes that which was used to anoint the high priest, and the kings of the Jewish nation. The materials of which it was composed are well known to have been pre-eminently costly and valuable, far more so than the most fine gold. In this point of view, precious ointment was, in the mouth of an Israelite, perhaps the strongest conceivable illustration of the value of a good name. At the same time, this unguent, being composed of the richest and most elegant aromatic substances, diffused extensively the most delightful fragrance, wherever it was employed. With reference to this fine character, the psalmist adopts it as a charming illustration of one of the most charming objects, ever seen in the present world. 'Behold,' he exclaims, 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head of Aaron, that went down to the skirts of his garment; as the dew of Hermon, that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.' A more exquisite illustration of the delightful impression made by a fair character could not be given.

Such a character is of inestimable value to the possessor, if considered merely *as a source of enjoyment*. The esteem of our fellow-men is probably regarded by the great body of mankind, as standing

in the list of enjoyments next to self-approbation. Common sense, as well as the Scriptures, pronounces loving-favour to be better than silver and gold. The opinion of wise and good men may be considered, in all ordinary cases, as the best criterion of worth on this side of the grave ; and their good-will, which always accompanies their esteem, as the richest possession which does not descend immediately from heaven. Even in that happy world, the uninterrupted and intense complacency of its glorious inhabitants will, after the favour of God and the peace of a self-approving mind, constitute the prime ingredient of eternal joy.

In the world of misery, on the contrary, all the inhabitants, being destitute of all good character in the eyes of each other, will be the subjects of perpetual shame, and the objects of mutual and everlasting contempt. These ingredients of suffering, so terrible even in the present world, will there become the means of inexpressible woe. They will be despised by themselves ; they will be despised by each other ; they will be objects of abhorrence to God, and to the whole virtuous universe. The anguish inflicted by this engine of torture so completely in that melancholy world, is often excruciating in this. In how many instances has the consciousness of contempt, even from a single person, driven its miserable victim to suicide !

Nor is a good name less indispensable to *the attainment of confidence*, and of all the blessings, by which confidence is *followed*. If we are unpossessed of a fair character, no one will confide in us. Without confidence, beside losing the serene and high enjoyment which it communicates, we shall be prevented from all useful employment, and from all the benefits which would flow from such employment to ourselves, and through us to others.

A fair character is also essential to *personal usefulness*. A man destitute of reputation is, of course, destitute of influence ; and virtuous influence is the principal means of usefulness. The good which we

an individually do, must ever be small ; that which we may influence others to do, can be very great. If we are destitute of this instrument of beneficence, we can never persuade others to unite with us in any valuable purpose ; and must on every occasion, however important, stand alone. Our talents are thus in a great measure, rendered useless ; and our power of contributing to the welfare of our fellow-men, and promoting the cause of righteousness, is shrunk and withered.

In the loss of our reputation also, and in all its miserable consequences ; *our connexions necessarily partake ; particularly our friends, and our families.* Whoever wishes well to the sufferer feels the wound. Thus the evils instead of being suffered by us only are felt by *multitudes* ; and often with anguish not inferior to our own.

Whenever the persons whose character is thus injured are in public stations, or are otherwise possessed of superior consequence, the mischief becomes more extensive, and more important. Thus a slander directed against a minister of the gospel, is a wound to the church ; a calumny branded upon a magistrate of distinction is felt by the whole community.

Finally : The loss of reputation both in itself, and especially in its consequences, the prevention of confidence, employment, and usefulness, brings with it *multitude of temptations, and prepares the mind for a ready perpetration of sin in every form, and extending to every degree.* Regard to character is a powerful motive to every species of good conduct ; and when duly felt, is an evangelical motive. ‘ Whatsoever things are honest, lovely, and of good report,’ St. Paul enjoins upon Christians as their duty. ‘ A bishop,’ also, the same apostle teaches us, ‘ must have a good report of them who are without’ the church, as one indispensable qualification for his election to the ministry of the gospel. Those who were without the church when this was written, were Jews and heathens. Yet, even among these

men, a bishop was required to sustain an unblemished reputation. Danger to character is also a prime restraint from all open wickedness, a restraint felt by every decent man every day of his life. He who is unconscious of it, has already become almost desperate. He who discovers that he disregards it, will be pronounced by his fellow-men abandoned.

In accordance with these observations, the Scriptures have solemnly guarded personal reputation in various ways. They have taught the high value of a good name; declared the guilt, and odiousness, of slander and tale-bearing; prohibited strongly the practice of these crimes, and threatened the perpetrators with exemplary punishment. Municipal law also has hedged the private character of every man with a strong enclosure; and denounced against every trespasser heavy penalties.

From these considerations it is manifest, that the mischiefs involved in the loss of reputation are to individuals incomprehensibly great. Rarely does the thief or the cheat rob his fellow-men of 'great riches.' The slanderer therefore accomplishes a greater injury than either of these villains; for 'a good name is better than great riches.' It is of no consequence whether his efforts succeed, or not. The thief is not the less a thief because he drops his booty; nor the cheat the less a cheat because he is detected in his fraud. If, then, the slanderer is not more despised and abhorred than either, it is because reputation is not esteemed according to its value.

2. *The public evils of slander are too numerous to permit, and too obvious to need, a discussion in this place.*

I have already remarked, that when persons of consequence are attacked by calumny, the mischief is extensively spread. The slandering of private individuals is capable also of extending far, and of harassing not a little the peace of society. There is in many places a kind of indulgence often given to that pestilential class of mankind, the retailers of private history. In villages, precluded by their size or their situation from being theatres of public news,

a strong propensity is often discovered to listen to those who employ their time in prying into the private concerns of their neighbours. Encouraged by this kind of approbation, as well as urged onward by restless curiosity, and an eager spirit of meddling, persons of this description multiply without number their suspicions, their inuendoes, their predictions of evil, and their tales of mischief. Speedily, jealousies are excited between neighbour and neighbour, between friend and friend. Speedily the offices of good-will and good neighbourhood are withdrawn. Social visits are interdicted. Kindness, both in opinion and in conduct, ceases; and a village, in which peace and good order have long prevailed, is thrown into an uproar. The general conversation is made up of ridicule, invective, and threatening; and a quiet life gives place to quarrels and litigations. Even in the house of God the inhabitants find themselves scarcely able to unite with each other in the worship of their Maker.

But the spirit of slander is not confined to villages, nor towns, nor cities. It often flies at higher objects; and boldly intrudes upon the hall of justice, the senate-house, and the chair of state. No life is too spotless, no character is too sacred, to be assaulted and destroyed by this evil genius of man. A single calumny, especially in seasons of violent party, has set a nation in a flame; and for a season consumed its peace, and wasted its prosperity. The evils suffered in this case are numberless, and incomprehensible. One of the chief sources of the unprecedented crimes and sufferings attendant upon the French revolution, was the slander of distinguished men, both in public and private life. Misrepresentation and obloquy have been more fatal enemies to the cause of Christianity than the faggot and the rack.

IV. *Among the dissuaves from this sin I shall briefly suggest the following:—*

1. *It is eminently odious in the sight of God.*

The great body of slanderers are liars; and are

therefore chargeable with all the gross wickedness attributed to men of this character, and exposed to all the awful threatenings denounced against them in the Scriptures. 'Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour,' says David, under the guidance of the Spirit of truth, directing his duty as the ruler of Israel, 'him will I cut off.' In that kingdom therefore this crime was made capital by a divine decision. The slanderer also, and that when he is not, as well as when he is, the inventor of a false calumny is, in Psal. xv. excluded from the favourable presence of God. 'Lord,' saith the psalmist, 'who shall abide in thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in thy holy hill?' One answer to this inquiry is the following: 'He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.'

2. *Every person guilty of this sin exposes himself also to the hatred and contempt of mankind.*

A slanderer is a common enemy. All considerate persons know and feel this truth, and guard themselves with watchful care against his attacks. So far as their circumstances will permit, they shun, and warn their children and friends to shun, his company. Not mere suspicion, but a well-founded and deeply felt conviction of his hostility to the common interests of men, meets him wherever he goes. His presence creates only pain. His tongue is a blast upon human comfort; and his name is an additional spot upon the human character.

No member of this audience, I presume, feels that he is prepared to encounter an evil of this magnitude. It is a terrible consideration, that mankind are less afraid to offend their God, than to provoke the resentment of their fellow-men. Still, it furnishes some consolation, that the dread of public odium and contempt is a powerful hindrance of open iniquity, and a forcible restraint upon evil dispositions. If any individual present feels adventurous enough to hazard this evil, or is indifferent about it, let him recollect with what agitation he has sustained even slight attacks upon his character; how

tremblingly apprehensive he has been, lest a few, or even one of those around him should believe the calumny, and lest he should be regarded with hatred and contempt on a speck of earth, and by a handful of mankind. If he could not sustain this shock, how unprepared must he be to meet the common assault of the human race! How must he shrink, and falter, and fall, when indignation burns against him in every breast, contempt flashes on him from every eye, and a sentence of final condemnation is pronounced on him by every tongue! How will he bear to be shunned by all decent society; pointed at by the finger of prudence, as well as of scorn, and hissed wherever he appears, not by vulgarity, ill-nature, and enmity only, but by decency, delicacy, and common sense! How will he bear to spend his days in a kind of solitude in the midst of mankind, to be welcomed cordially to no man's bosom, to be regarded as a public nuisance, to be suspected and dreaded, and to have his presence regarded as a burden, and his character as a brand, upon the human race! Especially, how will he bear all this, and feel at the same time, that in all this no injustice is done to him; since he has merited it all by his own vile and infamous conduct!

3. *The immense mischiefs occasioned by slander, ought to deter every man who has not, and to stop every man who has, entered upon this guilty career.*

There are persons to whom I should scarcely think of addressing this consideration. But to this audience it may surely be addressed with success. It cannot for a moment be admitted even with decency, that those who are before me can be indifferent to the thought of doing such mischiefs to their fellow-men. Think what it will be to stab the character, to destroy the peace and the usefulness, even of one of your fellow-creatures. Remember, how tenderly you regard your own reputation; how deeply you have been pierced even by the darts of ridicule; how suddenly you have shrunk from the eye of scorn; and now you have trembled under a tale of slander, or a

soul aspersion. Remember, that others have their feelings also. Remember, that reputation is to *them* as dear, calumny as unwelcome, contempt as oppressive, and disgrace as full of anguish, as to *you*. Then ask yourselves, whether you can consent to be the authors of these evils?

All this, however, is only the first stage of the mischiefs which you will accomplish. Extend your views from individuals to families. How much happiness in these little, delightful circles is often destroyed by a single calumnious tale! How often are the hearts of parents broken, and the peace of their children destroyed, by false imputations of dishonesty to a son, or impurity to a daughter! How often is the domestic group clustered together with terror and anguish, by false charges upon the good name of a parent! Before, they were happy. Why are they not happy now? Because a fiend in the shape and with the tongue of a man has blasted all their enjoyments.

But the mischiefs do not stop here. Families are set at variance with each other, friends are converted into enemies, and neighbours into strangers. Harmony, hospitality, and peace sicken and die before the foul breath of slander. Every office of kindness is interrupted; and the spirit of Christianity itself, amazed, perplexed, bewildered, looks around in vain, or almost in vain, to find proper objects of its beneficence, and means and modes of administering it with success. To the happiness of good neighbourhood succeeds a train of grovelling, base, serpentine hostilities; depraving all who practise them, and distressing all against whom they are practised. Anxiety and dismay haunt every fire-side; and a funeral gloom settles upon every prospect, and broods over every hope.

4. *The slanderer ought to be deterred from his purpose by the incalculable mischiefs which he will do to himself*

It cannot be supposed that in such a course of hostilities against his fellow-men, the slanderer will escape from the common resentment of those whom

has injured. As he is an enemy to all men, all men become at length enemies to him. Such as have smarted severely from his tongue will usually take effectual care to make him smart in his turn. The vengeance executed upon him will often be exemplary. Sometimes he will be chastised. Sometimes he will be prosecuted. Sometimes he will be excluded from all decent society; and often, if not always, he will be openly insulted with indignities which he knows not how to brook, and yet dares not resist. The consciousness of his guilt will make him a coward; while a painful conviction that his sufferings are a mere and just retribution of his crimes, will point every sting, and give a double force to every blow.

Still more ought he to be alarmed at the certain prospect of depraving himself. Slander is a compound of falsehood, injustice, unkindness, and meanness; forming in itself a character eminently depraved. What is so unhappily begun, proceeds with a rapid and dreadful declension. All the designs which he forms in the indulgence of this characteristical propensity, all the measures which he feels obliged to employ, all the instruments which he can summon to his assistance, all the gratification which he can experience in his success, are such, and such only, as contribute to shrink, debase, and pollute his mind. In such a soil a noble generous thought would instantly wither. To such a bosom honourable friendship cannot approach. At the door of such a heart Christianity knocks for admittance in vain. His career is the career of abandonment only, through a path of steep and rapid descent, 'going down to the chambers of death.'

SERMON CXXIX.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

CONTENTMENT.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.—Exod. xx. 17.

THE preceding precepts of the Decalogue, so far as the language in which they are written is concerned, are apparently intended to regulate chiefly the *external* conduct of mankind. Had they not been explained by the prophets who followed Moses, and still more by our Saviour and his apostles, plausible reasons might be alleged why all of them, even the fourth, might be satisfied by external observances. But the precept in the text is directed immediately and only to the *heart*, and is intended supremely to control the disposition. The propensity forbidden in it is *covetousness*; an inordinate desire of worldly enjoyments; and particularly an inordinate desire of such enjoyments when in the possession of others. We may lawfully desire the enjoyments furnished by this world; and that even when they belong to our fellow-men, if the desire is confined within due bounds. We may desire lawfully the lands and houses of others, when they are willing to part with them, and we are equally willing to purchase them at an equitable price. We may lawfully wish to obtain any share of worldly good with which God may crown our honest and industrious efforts, and which we may be prepared to enjoy with a spirit of gratitude, beneficence, and moderation. ‘I know,’ says Solomon, ‘that there is no good in them’ (that is, in the creatures which God has made in this world, or the things created here), ‘but for a man to rejoice, and to do

good in his life ; and also, that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour : it is the gift of God.'

An inordinate desire of natural good seems, in the order of things, to be the commencement of sin in a virtuous being. Our first parents began their apostasy by coveting the forbidden fruit as an enjoyment, and wishing to become 'as gods, knowing good and evil.' In this disposition seem naturally to be involved *ambition, avarice, and voluptuous wishes* for its attainment : and out of it to spring, as consequences, *pride, vanity, and criminal sensuality*, in its enjoyment ; *envy* towards those who possess more of it than ourselves ; *anger and malice* towards those who hinder us from acquiring it ; *revenge* towards those who have deprived us of it ; *falsehood*, as the means of achieving and securing it ; *forgetfulness*, and therefore *ingratitude*, with respect to such as give it ; and *impiety, and consequent rebellion, repining, and profaneness*, towards him from whom we receive less of it than our unreasonable wishes demand. In a word, to this disposition may be traced with no great difficulty most, if not all, of the sins committed by mankind. The text therefore appears to be levelled at the root of bitterness ; at a sinful disposition in its original form, and in the very commencement of its existence. If we obey this precept with the heart, and it cannot otherwise be obeyed, that obedience will immediately fulfil all the demands of the other precepts belonging to the second table, or those regulating our duty to mankind ; and, consequentially, will fulfil those of the first. The tenth command therefore may be regarded as, in an extensive sense, a summary of our duty.

This command directly prohibits *coveting* ; or, in other words, *ambition, avarice, and voluptuous desire*. Of course it requires universally *contentment*, and, by easy implication, *charity*. Of consequence, also, it forbids *discontentment* and *envy*. *Contentment*, the virtue required in this precept, shall be the principal subject of the present Discourse. With this subject I shall connect some observations concerning *discon-*

contentment and envy. Concerning voluptuous desires I shall not here enter into any discussion.

In examining this subject I shall,

I. *Describe the nature ;*

II. *Mention the benefits of contentment.*

The nature of contentment has been very often misapprehended. Persons often suppose themselves to be contented, when they are merely gay, or glad ; when a native or accidental sprightliness of mind excludes sorrow and gloom ; or when a multiplicity of enjoyments, the gratification of a darling wish, or the success of a favourite enterprise, or the arrival of some unexpected benefit, fills the heart with pleasure. Others mistake *indifference* and *phlegm* for contentment ; and others still, that kind of *dull equanimity* which springs from uniform, grave, and spiritless employments ; destroying all the elasticity of the mind, and settling it down in an immoveable stagnation. The contentment which is the object of this precept, differs radically from all these dispositions. A man may be gay, or glad, and yet be totally destitute of this virtue. His natural disposition may incline him to flutter from one amusement to another, without suffering him to settle seriously upon any. Still the disposition which he mistakes for contentment is only sportiveness. But no man will mistrust, that sportiveness is the disposition required by this precept. A man may be greatly delighted with his present enjoyments. But no person beside himself will mistake his pleasure for contentment ; and a reverse of fortune may convince even him, that there is a wide difference between these two states of mind. Much less can the other attributes which I have mentioned, lay a claim to this title. There is nothing excellent or amiable in being merely grave, insensible of sufferings, or indifferent about them.

The words used in the Scriptures to denote contentment, involve, as one of their significations, the *restraining ourselves ;* and, as another, the *supporting of such burdens as are incumbent on us.* It includes,

therefore, the supposition, that the contented person is placed in circumstances which demand the restraint of his inclinations, and the sustentation of difficulties. Such, plainly, are the circumstances of every being who can, with strict propriety, be said to be contented. To say, that an *angel* was contented, would certainly be incorrect phraseology. An angel is *happy*; all his circumstances being completely gratifying to his desires. A *man*, whom many troubles befall, and many burdens press, may, by steadily restraining his inclinations to murmur at the former, and serenely supporting the latter, be *contented*. Such is always the situation of man, upon the whole. He is never, for any length of time, in a situation entirely agreeable to him. On the contrary, he is always required, in some degree, and at short intervals, to suffer. If he possess a contented spirit, he will suffer with quietness and serenity.

Having premised these general remarks, I observe, that *evangelical contentment*, the object of the command in the text, involves,

1. *A fixed belief of the reality and excellency of the divine government.*

The divine government is, throughout the Scriptures, made the foundation of every delightful, and even every comfortable thought. This scheme is perfectly accordant with the dictates of reason. Both the views and prospects of the atheist, as I have heretofore shewn at large,* are gloomy and desolate, full of perplexity and discouragement, and destitute alike of comfort and hope. 'The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice;' is a declaration, and a precept founded on it which a very limited understanding will shew us to be just, and a very moderate degree of rectitude incline us to obey.

It is not, however, sufficient to ensure our obedience, however well disposed, that we believe in the superintendence of *some* all-controlling agent. It is the government of Jehovah in which we are required

* See Sermon III.

to rejoice ; the result of the wisdom, power, and goodness which constitute the perfect character of this glorious Being. No man can be contented who does not believe that the administration by which all his own interests, both personal and social, are ultimately to be decided, is both just and benevolent. The state of things with which we are immediately concerned, is mysterious and distressing. The mysteries we cannot unravel ; the distresses we often find it difficult to bear. Both united must frequently be insupportable, unless we could confide in the wisdom and goodness of him who controls the universe, as furnishing sufficient assurance, that they are right and good in themselves, and will in the end be shewn to be right and good. The reality and excellence of the divine government therefore must indispensably be objects of a steady faith to a contented mind.

2. *Contentment involves a humble hope, generally existing, that we are interested in the divine favour.*

We suffer many evils in the present world. Philosophy bids us suffer them with firmness, since they cannot be avoided ; and since impatience and sinking under them will only make them heavier. I am not disposed to deny the prudence, or even the propriety, of this precept. It may be, it usually is, true, that we lessen the degree of our sufferings by resolving firmly to endure them. But it is equally true, that the immoveable nature of evils is no cause of contentment. On the contrary, it is always the most distressing consideration which can attend them. This, however, is the only support which philosophy can give to the sufferer.

No motive can rationally make us willing to suffer. There is no virtue in suffering evil for its own sake. All rational submission to evil arises from the consideration that God wills us to suffer, as the proper reward of our sins, and as the means of promoting his glory, and the good of ourselves, or others ; of others alway, and of ourselves if we do not prevent it by our disobedience to his pleasure. This

motive to contentment, Christianity holds out to its disciples invariably, by pointing their attention and their faith to the government of God. The hope of an interest in his favour Christianity also regularly inspires, by presenting to them all the promises of infinite mercy through the mediation of Christ. Without such a hope, the ills of life would often overcome the equanimity of such minds as ours. The outcast would be feebly supported by an assurance that he could obtain no relief for his sufferings; and the martyr by being told that his flames could not be extinguished. In the hope of the divine mercy, a remedy is found for every present evil; and he who exercises it will naturally summon all his powers to sustain with serenity distresses which, although grievous for the present, will operate as the means, and terminate in the enjoyment, of everlasting good.

3. *Contentment involves a conviction, that it is both our duty and our interest to acquiesce in the divine dispensations.*

With the dispositions already mentioned, it may be regarded as a thing of course, that such a conviction will prevail in the mind. If God is the universal Ruler; if his government is the result of infinite excellence; if what he does, or permits to be done, is right in itself, and will hereafter appear to be right; if we are furnished with a humble hope of an interest in his favour; then, however mysterious and perplexing the events of Divine Providence may be, and however distressing to us, we still shall see and feel abundant reason to be satisfied. We shall readily admit, that the most untoward events, the most difficult to be reconciled with our apprehensions of wisdom and goodness, are difficult only in the view of creatures, whose minds are limited like ours. We shall believe that they are perplexing, only because we cannot explain them; that they seem wrong, only because we cannot understand them. With such views, we shall cheerfully resign the government of the universe into the hands of its Maker, and wait for the removal of our own perplexities, until the day when 'the mystery shall be

finished,' when God shall appear just in judging, and clear even in condemning.

4. *Contentment implies a cordial acknowledgment that we are unworthy of the mercies which we receive.*

There are in the present world many afflictions. If we are guiltless beings, our sufferance of them must be unmerited ; and the communication of them to us by our Creator is irreconcilable with all our ideas of equity. If we admit God to be just, we are obliged also to admit that ourselves are sinners. If we are not sinners, but are unjustly distressed, there is no reason why we should be contented with our situation. No being can be bound to be contented with injustice. But if we are sinners, we can have no claim to any favour. If we are conscious that we are sinners, we shall see, that we have no such claim. We shall see that, however small our blessings may appear, God ' hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.' Enjoyments, in the view of a mind thus attempered, will all appear to be mere gifts of sovereign goodness, mere emanations of benevolence, to a being destitute of any claim to the favour of God. Without such views, seated in the heart, and controlling its affections, it appears to me impossible that such a being as man should be contented.

5. *Contentment involves a disposition steadily to mark the daily mercies of God.*

The great body of mankind seem to regard their enjoyments either as things of course ; or as acquisitions made by their own ingenuity and efforts. With such views it seems impossible that they should consider them as blessings. Their afflictions, on the contrary, they appear to consider as mere hardships ; partly as injuries done to them by their fellow-men, and partly as vexations and unlucky events, brought upon them by they know not what untoward chance, or evil destiny. Accordingly, in their hours of complaining, they customarily pronounce themselves to be ill-starred, unlucky, unfortunate, persecuted by ill fortune, plagued and harassed ; and,

what is very remarkable, never speak of themselves as chastised or afflicted by God. According to their own account, their enjoyments are accidents and acquisitions, not blessings; and their sufferings are calamities, not judgments of God.

Multitudes also, who do not go all this length, suffer the mercies which they daily receive, and these both invaluable and numberless, to pass by them in a great measure unregarded. Converse with these men on this subject, and they will readily acknowledge that all their enjoyments are gifts of God, and in no sense merited by themselves. Still, from their ordinary conversation and conduct, it is evident that such acknowledgments are no part of the current state of their minds. From their obvious indifference, from their regardless inattention, amid the common and most necessary blessings of life, it is undeniably certain, that they are scarcely conscious even of the existence, much less of the source of these blessings. Were these persons to number their enjoyments, they would be astonished to find their amount. Were they to estimate them, they would be equally astonished to perceive their value. Were they to examine their own character, they would be amazed that blessings of such value, and of such an amount, were bestowed on themselves.

The man who actually adopts this conduct, will soon discern, in the importance and number of his enjoyments, and in his own undeserving character, ample reasons, not only for being satisfied, but also for being grateful. On the one hand, he will admire that divine goodness which is manifested to him every hour in so many forms; and will wonder, on the other, that it should be manifested to so guilty and undeserving a creature. So long as we do not perceive these facts (and unless we mark them, we shall not perceive them), it seems impossible that we should possess a contented spirit.

6. *Contentment involves the moderation of those desires which are directed to worldly enjoyments.*

There are two modes in which mankind seek hap-

piness: *Indulging their wishes, and seeking to find objects, sufficient in their nature and number to gratify them; and confining their wishes, by choice and system, to a moderate number of objects: and thus preparing themselves to find their enjoyment in such objects as, in the ordinary course of things, they may rationally expect to obtain.* The former of these modes is generally pursued by mankind. Still it is palpably unwise, full of danger, and regularly attended by disappointment, mortification, and distress. Every man who adopts it will be compelled to learn, that the state of this world is altogether unsuited to satisfy numerous and eager desires. The enjoyments which it furnishes are comparatively few and small. They are incapable therefore of fulfilling the demands of numerous and extensive desires. At the same time, he will find his desires enlarging incomparably more, and increasing incomparably faster, than their gratifications. A rich man covets property with far more greediness than the possessor of moderate wealth. He who has entered the chase for fame, power, or pleasure, will find his wishes become more vehement, as well as more expanded, by every new instance of success; and will soon perceive, that what he once thought to be sufficient good, has ceased to be good at all. If he gains all that he pursues, he will therefore be continually less and less satisfied; and, while 'he snatches on the right hand, and devours on the left,' he will still be 'hungry' in the midst of his gluttony and plunder.

Incomparably more wise and hopeful is the latter of these modes. The wishes which are directed to worldly enjoyments can be controlled, to an indefinite degree, by reason, firmness, and regular pre-concertion. In this case, the mind, demanding only moderate enjoyments, may ordinarily be in a good measure satisfied; for moderate enjoyments not only exist in our present state, but are commonly attainable without much difficulty by the great body of mankind. Our wishes, in this case, are suited to our circumstances. As therefore our enjoyment is com

mensurate to the satisfaction of our wishes ; so, when our wishes are moderate, the moderate enjoyments which this world supplies will furnish us with sufficient gratification.

Without this moderation of our desires, contentment cannot exist. An eager pursuit of earthly good would make an angel discontented. Vehement desires ungratified are sure and copious sources of misery. The demands of enjoyment in the mind which cherishes them, are too high to be satisfied by any thing which this world has to give. The mind seeks for enjoyment, not with the spirit of a rational, industrious man, but with that of a miser ; and cries unceasingly, ' Give, give ;' but, whatever may be its acquisitions, is never sufficiently satisfied to be able to say, ' It is enough.'

7. Contentment involves self-approbation.

All enjoyment commences in the state of the mind itself. When that is disturbed, no external gratifications can be relished or regarded. No seasoning, no daintiness, will enable him who is languishing under a fever to relish even the choicest viands. But to ease of mind self-approbation is indispensable. Unless the conscience approve and smile, serenity can never overspread the world within. So long as the conscience reproaches, wounds, and terrifies, the soul must be perturbed, restless, and unhappy. That contentment should exist in such a mind, can neither be proper nor possible. But, whenever the man begins to submit to be controlled by his conscience, he begins to be approved by himself. The tumult of the soul then begins to subside ; the storm ceases to lower, and to threaten ; the violence of the blast is hushed ; the angry clouds disperse ; a summer evening overspreads the soul ; calm, serene, bright, the promise of a future, peaceful, and delightful day.

II. I shall now briefly mention some of the benefits of contentment.

1. This disposition of mind secures to us the favour of God.

The preceding observations make it evident, tha

contentment is, in an extensive sense, obedience to the divine will. It is also directly and repeatedly commanded in the Scriptures. To Timothy, St. Paul writes, 'Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.' To the Hebrews he says, universally, 'Be content with such things as ye have.' This injunction he also enforces by the best of all reasons: viz. that 'God hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' That God is pleased with obedience to his commands, needs no illustration. Equally unnecessary, would be an attempt to shew that a state of mind, formed, as contentment obviously is, chiefly of faith, submission, humility, gratitude, and self-government, must be obedience eminently acceptable. But him whom God approves, he will bless. The promise of the divine favour to such as cordially obey the divine will are spread every where throughout the Scriptures, and not one of them will fail of being accomplished. But the favour of God is the sum of all benefits, and the source whence every other proceeds. Contentment begins with a hope of the divine favour; and, as a continued course of obedience to the commands of God, originates unceasingly new hopes, and makes sure of new communications of the same invaluable blessing.

2. *Contentment enables him who possesses it to perform his duty with more exactness and more pleasure than he can otherwise attain.*

The contented mind is unencumbered by many cares and many hindrances which usually obstruct and retard men in the performance of their duty. The serenity of its disposition leaves it at full leisure calmly to examine, and therefore clearly to understand, and thoroughly to feel, the nature, directions, and amount of its duty. Satisfied with the divine dispensations, and assured of the approbation of him whose dispensations they are, it is prepared beforehand to accord with their tenor, and to perform whatever they may require. In this case, its obedience obviously becomes easy, cheerful, and of course delightful, as well as uniform and exact. It is the punctilious and

cheerful obedience of a *child*, compared with which the occasional and reluctant performances of a discontented man, are merely the mercenary drudgery of an unfaithful *servant*. But to perform our duty with pleasure, is to lead a life of enjoyment ; for our duty returns every moment of our lives. To perform our duty also with exactness, is not only delightful in itself, but is a continual source of self-approbation and peace ; and the only source whence these blessings can be derived.

3. *The man in whom this spirit prevails is secured from many temptations and many sins to which others are exposed.*

A *discontented* man naturally indulges, and is always liable to the sin of murmuring against God, arraigning his justice, wisdom, and goodness, and hardening his heart against his mercy ; because he is impatient under his own allotments, and unwilling to accord with any proposals from a Being whose character he disrelishes, and whose conduct he regards as the source of his troubles. The *envious* man is prompted by his ruling disposition to repine at the blessings of others, to accuse God of partiality in bestowing them, to wish them lessened, to resort not unfrequently to active, insidious, and malignant exertions for the purpose of lessening them, and to exercise a kind of infernal joy when they are taken away. Such a man turns a gloomy, misanthropic eye on all those who he thinks are richer, greater, wiser, or happier than himself. From these rebellious and fiend-like dispositions, from the temptations which they create, and the sins to which they lead, the contented mind is delightfully free. Satisfied with its own lot, it feels no anxiety, mortification, or opposition to its Maker, because others are possessed of superior good. Particularly, it is undisturbed by the sight of superior wealth in the possession of others ; of superior power, pleasures, reputation, and influence. On all these splendours it can look, as the eagle on the sun, with a steady and serene eye ; and can find its happiness not lessened,

but increased, 'because others are happy. The disposal, both of its own concerns and theirs, it is willing to leave wholly to God; and prepared to enjoy any good which he is pleased to bestow, whoever may be the recipient. Thus,

4. *It is a disposition eminently peaceful and comfortable.*

On the one hand, it is preserved from many troubles, suffered by others; and on the other, finds many pleasures, which others never know. The distress experienced in an unceasing course of disappointments, by all discontented, covetous, and ambitious men, is chiefly unknown to him, who has acquired this delightful spirit. Equally free is he also from the pain of ungratified desires, and from continual fears that his desires will be ungratified. Nor is he less secure from that complication of woe, which springs incessantly from distrust of the goodness and faithfulness of God, from murmuring against his providence, from reluctance to obey his pleasure, and from the consciousness of not having faithfully obeyed at all. At the same time, he is delivered from those fears of future woe which so often harass the minds of guilty men.

It is not here intended to insinuate, that the contented man is free from afflictions; but that he is comparatively free from them is unquestionable. Contentment will not remove the thorns and briers spread over this unhappy world by the apostasy, and renew upon its face the bloom, the beauty, and the fragrance of Eden. But it will blunt the point of many a thorn, and convert many a wilderness into a fruitful field. The sorrows which it feels will be all allayed by the remembrance, that they come from the hand of the infinitely Good; and by the hope, that they will all terminate in the promotion of its own best interests. To the blast of calamity also it yields, like the willow; and is therefore not rooted up and destroyed. In the mean time, whenever troubles arrive, however numerous or great they may be, their distressing efficacy is always allayed by the soothing balmy influence of peace and self-approbation.

This delightful influence also is regularly diffused over every enjoyment. The enjoyments of the contented man are in his view all gifts and blessings not acquisitions, made by his own ingenuity and efforts. As gifts, they are relished with gratitude to their glorious Author. The light in which they are seen by this grateful disposition is always glossy and brilliant, and the taste which they furnish is singularly sweet. Thus the contented man finds pleasures, where others find only troubles. Thus, when troubles arrest him, their bitterness is allayed; and thus all the pleasures which he finds are enhanced by his own happy disposition. Even in seasons when darkness overspreads the world, and such seasons it must be acknowledged there are, when the gloom overshadows *his* mind, as well as the minds of those around him; and when the face of the Sun of righteousness is eclipsed to the eyes of mankind; hope, humble and serene, will lift up her exploring eye, and behold the divine luminary still visible, and environing the intervening darkness with a circle of glory.

5. *Contentment renders its possessor eminently pleasing and comfortable to others.*

Uniform serenity, cheerfulness, and sweetness of disposition, constitute that character in man, which to his fellow-men is more agreeable than any other. Religion itself, however pious and benevolent the mind may be, is despoiled, if sensibly destitute of this disposition, of its peculiar burnish and beauty. It will indeed be approved and esteemed; but it will not be entirely relished. Gravity, existing beyond a certain degree, may render it forbidding. Reserve may render it suspicious; and a sorrowful, melancholy aspect may excite a sympathy so painful, as to make it unwelcome. But a sweet, serene, and cheerful temper is the object, not only of esteem, but of delight. The presence of a person who manifests this temper is universally coveted, and diffuses a kind of lustre over every circle. He is accordingly welcome to every house, and to every company.

Even men destitute of religion will strongly relish his company, and will never mention his character without pointed commendations.

Beside the immediate and extensive pleasure which such a person communicates to those with whom he converses, this disposition recommends his opinions, his rules of life, his various conduct, and the several plans which he proposes for the benefit of mankind. Multitudes will embark with readiness and ardour in the promotion of purposes which he recommends, because they are recommended by him ; because they think favourably of whatever he proposes, and love to unite with him in any pursuit. Thus this spirit, beside rendering him eminently agreeable to others, gives him an influence with mankind which he could not otherwise possess ; and in the happiest manner increases his power to do good. It deserves particular consideration, that some of the most popular men who have ever lived in this country have not been distinguished for brilliancy of genius, extensiveness of views, or profoundness of research ; but, while they possessed respectable talents, were remarkably distinguished by the disposition which I have here described.

Of this disposition, contentment is the uniform and the only efficacious source. By a discontented man, it can be assumed only by effort, and for a moment ; and must speedily and characteristically give way to the uneasy fretful spirit which has taken possession of his mind. There is indeed a native good humour, which is pleasant to the possessor, and very agreeable to those with whom he converses. But this desirable disposition, although possessing many advantages, is radically defective, because it is a mere propensity, and not a moral principle. Too frail to sustain the rude shocks, or the long continued pressure of adversity, it is prone to give way in seasons of severe trial ; and is incapable of the serene and steady endurance, so characteristic of a contented mind. Such a mind may bend ; but, while life lasts, it will not break. Where native

good humour would shrink and fly from the conflict, on innumerable occasions, the contented mind will firmly brave the danger, sustain the assault, and, with a cool, noiseless, unruffled energy, in the end overcome. At the same time, such a mind will always find at hand a divine auxiliary, an Almighty friend, ever present, ever watchful, ever extending his arm to protect, strengthen, and give the victory. This indispensable aid native good humour cannot claim. All its ultimate reliance is fixed on this world. Its eye is never lifted upward, but fastens on earth and time for all its resources. Contentment, on the contrary, while she finds more sweetness in earthly enjoyment than good humour can ever find, and far more effectually lightens the pressure of calamity by the assistance which this world presents, fixes her eye on the heavens for superior aid; and sees the thickest darkness of suffering, and even of death, delightfully illumined by beams of glory, shining from beyond the grave!

SERMON CXXX.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

CHARITY.

Charge them that are rich in this world—that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come. That they may lay hold on eternal life.—1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

THERE are, as I have heretofore observed, two attributes of the human mind, in the indulgence of which we especially disobey the tenth command, viz. ambition and avarice. Contentment is opposed to both, particularly to the former. What in modern times

is called *charity*, that is, a disposition cheerfully to impart our property and kind offices to the poor and suffering, is especially opposed to the latter. Of course, it naturally becomes the next subject of our consideration in our progress.

In examining it, I propose briefly to point out,

I. *The nature of this duty.*

II. *The persons to whom,*

III. *The manner in which, it is to be performed ; and,*

IV. *The motives to the performance.*

I. I will endeavour to explain the nature of this duty.

It has been already mentioned as a general definition of charity, as an attribute of the human mind, that it is a disposition cheerfully to impart our property and our kind offices to the poor and suffering. But we are not to suppose that every cheerful communication of these benefits to persons of this description merits the name of charity in the evangelical sense.

Persons often aid the suffering merely from ostentation. These will not be suspected of charity.

Others do the same thing merely to free themselves from the importunate applications of those, by whom it is solicited. This will not be mistaken for charity.

Some, and those not a few, impart their property to the distressed, because they place little value upon property. Neither will this be soberly considered as charitable conduct.

Some perform charitable acts to free themselves from those reproaches of conscience, which they are assured will follow the refusal of such acts.

Multitudes perform offices of this nature from the hope of acquiring the esteem of others, and the various benefits which it is expected to confer.

Other multitudes extend relief to sufferers from a native spirit of generosity. This is amiable ; but is not even an intentional performance of any duty, and can therefore possess no evangelical character.

Others still do the same things, under the influence of constitutional compassion, or native tender-

ness. This also is amiable ; but for the same reason does not partake of an evangelical nature.

Some perform actions of this class because they have been taught and habituated in early life to perform them as a duty. Though they merit and obtain the esteem of those around them, yet they never with the heart, or in the evangelical sense perform any duty.

Others do works of this nature, because they have been accustomed to commend them highly, and are thus compelled to charitable exertions, for the sake of maintaining consistency of character.

Finally : Not a small number pursue a charitable course of life, because they think actions of this nature, the sum and substance of religion ; and expect by them to recommend themselves to the favour of God, and to obtain the blessings of a happy immortality. These men, whether aware of it or not, are intending to purchase heaven, by paying the price which they suppose to be set upon it in the gospel.

It must undoubtedly be admitted, that in several of these cases, that which is actually done is done cheerfully, and that property and kind offices are really imparted to the distressed ; yet in none of them, at least in my opinion, is there any degree of evangelical charity.

Charity, in the evangelical sense, is no other than the beneficence required by the gospel, administered, with the disposition which it requires, to a particular class of mankind, *viz.* those who are, or without this administration would be, in circumstances of distress. The disposition which is here intended is that '*Love which is the fulfilling of the law,*' the genuine source of every other duty.

If this account of the subject be admitted, it must also be conceded, that all acts of real charity are performed from a sense of duty, and with an intention to obey God in the performance ; and that this is indispensable to its very existence. It cannot therefore be the result of native tenderness or com-

passion. No virtue is in the proper sense an exercise of any human passion. Virtue, in all instances, is the energy of the mind directed to that which is right; or, in other words, agreeable to the will of God, and conducive to the good of the universe, because it is believed to be of this nature. The native affections of the mind are in several instances amiable, and often contribute to enhance and adorn the real exercise of virtue; but in themselves they are never in the evangelical sense, virtuous. That which is done without any sense of duty, and without an intention to perform a duty, can never sustain the character of virtue.

Farther: it is plain, if the above observations be admitted, that charity, in the sense of the gospel, is disinterested. The design, in every act which is entitled to this name, is to do real good to those who are its objects. The intention of the author of it will invariably be to promote the happiness, or to relieve the distresses of the sufferer; not to advance his own reputation, to promote his own selfish purposes, nor even to prevent the reproaches of his own conscience. In a word, selfishness, of whatever kind, and in whatever form it may exist, is not charity.

In addition to these things it may be observed, that evangelical charity demands essentially that we take delight in doing the good which is to be done.

It is more blessed,' in the original, 'It is more happy, to give than to receive;' that is, it is an employment, a character, attended of course with a higher degree of happiness; or, to declare the same truth in a more universal form, *It is a happier state to communicate good to others, than to gain it from their hands.* He who does not find some degree of this happiness in bestowing alms and other kindnesses upon his suffering fellow-creatures, has not yet begun to be charitable.

II. The persons, to whom these offices of kindness are to be performed, are various.

These are, universally, such as already suffer, or have become liable to some distress; to relieve or

prevent which, the kind offices, included under the name of charity, are necessary. It will readily occur, that within this broad description there must be not only many persons, but many classes of persons, differing very materially in their character and circumstances, and having therefore very different claims upon the kind offices of their fellow-men. Among these are found all gradations of character and of suffering.

The class which first obtrudes itself upon the eye, is that of the common wandering *beggars*, seen in every country, and particularly in the streets of every city. There are not wanting persons, and those of a fair reputation, who hold that alms ought not to be given to this miserable class of mankind. In their view, charity administered to them answers scarcely any other purpose than to encourage idleness, intemperance, and other vices to which these degraded beings are so generally addicted. Whatever is done for them, it is observed, is ordinarily useless, and worse than useless to themselves; and might always be bestowed on more deserving objects, and with happier effects. That to a great extent these observations are just, cannot be questioned. But it may be questioned, whether they are capable of so universal an application. Some of these persons, and the number is not small, are unable to labour; and are yet without friends or home. To wander, seems necessary for the preservation of their health, and even of their lives. It is not true of all of them, that they are vicious, nor that vice has been the means of reducing them to their present sufferings. I know of no evangelical principle which warrants us to leave them to perish, or to refuse the proper means of alleviating their distresses.

'We commanded you,' says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, 'that if any would not work, neither should he eat.' But it will not be supposed, that the apostle intended to include in this prohibition those who are unable to work, many of whom are found in this class of the indigent. To these, subsistence, comforts

medicines, and whatever kind offices are necessary, cannot be denied. Were no person suffered to wander in this manner, but such as I have described, probably objections never would have been started against admitting them within the pale of charity.

As to the really idle and vicious members, of which almost the whole of this class is apparently composed, it is, in my opinion, the duty of every government to force them, by every vindicable and necessary measure, to labour for their own subsistence.

Individuals are often unable to distinguish, among the wandering applicants for charity, which are proper objects of their bounty. In this uncertainty, it seems to be a good rule to relieve the distresses occasioned by hunger and nakedness, wherever we cannot satisfactorily prove imposition on the part of the applicant. Money is given to such persons, when given at all, without answering any valuable end.

Concerning the administration of charity to sufferers of every other description, there will be no dispute.

Among these, those whom Providence has stationed in our own neighbourhood seem, in ordinary cases, to have superior claims for relief upon us for three reasons; viz. that it is in our power to do them more good than we can do to others, because they are within our reach; that the poor, who are at a distance from us, will find other benefactors in their vicinity; and that, if we do not take a charitable care of those who surround us, they will ordinarily be without relief. It may be generally said, that Providence has placed them under our eye for the very purpose of awakening our beneficence towards them; and has thus, in a manner, which may be called *express*, required this service at our hands.

A distinction ought to be made among these, on the score of that modesty which prevents some of them from soliciting benefactions, and even from making known their sufferings; on account of the

industry and faithfulness with which some of them labour, amid many discouragements, to supply their own wants ; as well as with regard to the uprightness of their dispositions and the blamelessness of their lives. All these are obvious recommendations to evangelical charity. We are to '*do good unto all men, as we have opportunity, but especially to them who are of the household of faith.*' The poor and suffering who belong to this household have the first of all claims to the good which we are able to do. To relieve the distresses of these men, when the relief springs from the spirit of the gospel, is conduct so excellent, that, as Christ has expressly informed us, he will remember and distinguish it at the final day, and will regard the charity as being administered to himself.

Universally, the better the character of the sufferer, the higher will be his claims upon us for our beneficence.

III. *I will now endeavour to point out the manner in which this duty should be performed.*

Concerning this subject I observe,

1. *Our beneficence should obviously be such as to answer the end which is proposed.*

The sufferings of this world are almost endlessly diversified. The modes of administering charity ought plainly to be varied, so as to suit the varieties of distress. A large proportion of the evils of life arise from want. The communication of property, in some degree and form or other, is the proper means of removing those which belong to this class. Others are derived from sickness, pain, disgrace, the loss of friends, the want of friends, the want of encouragement in the business of life : often from the fact that we are strangers ; often from unkindness, contempt, and contumely ; often from ignorance, want of advice, and from very many other sources. There are also distresses merely of a moral nature, such as spring from unhappy errors concerning the doctrines and duties of religion, from ignorance of the way of salvation, from spiritual prejudices, from stupidity

from temptations, and universally from sin in all its forms and degrees. Now it is evident, that very different modes of relief must be applied to these numerous and diversified cases of suffering. That mode only is of any value, which is fitted to accomplish the end. To employ ourselves in giving grave advice to a person famishing with hunger, would be not merely idle, but ludicrous; and to offer food to a person labouring under the pangs of a broken heart, would be a specimen of folly equally contemptible.

2. *Our charity should be administered in such a degree as actually to accomplish the end.*

It is not enough to mitigate a calamity, when it is in our power to remove it; to assuage a disease, when we are able to complete the cure; to give advice or consolation to a youth, whose spirits are sinking for want of employment, when it is in our power to put him into useful business; to pity a backsliding Christian, when we are able to restore him to his duty; to pray for the conversion of the heathen when we can send them the word of God, and missionaries to preach it. Particularly, it is never enough to expend our benevolence to the distressed in talking, however wisely, however affectionately, however evangelically, concerning their sufferings, and the proper means of relieving them; or in breathing sighs, or shedding tears, or uttering good wishes over their distresses. 'If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding, ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit?' Nothing is more absurd, nothing is more contemptible, than the charity which evaporates in words and wishes.

3. *It is our duty, so far as it is in our power, to relieve greater distresses in preference to those which are small.*

The smaller sufferings of those around us are by no means to be neglected; and they have this recommendation to our particular attention, that we can almost always relieve them, when such as are greater may demand efforts beyond the limits of our

ability. When this is not the case, a greater suffering prefers a proportionally stronger claim to our charitable exertions.

4. *When we have objects of charity in our neighbourhood, for whose relief we propose to contribute with regularity, it is ordinarily better to furnish them with a considerable sum at once, than to communicate to them the same aid in a number of smaller sums.*

Small sums are not only of little value in reality, but are usually regarded, especially by persons of this class, as being still less valuable. Improvidence is almost always a prominent feature in the character of those who permanently need charity. They neither have a just sense of the value of property, nor just apprehensions of the modes in which it may be laid out in the best manner. Little sums will in their view be incapable of answering any important purpose; and they rarely think of hoarding them, until the accumulation shall become considerable. They will, therefore, usually expend them on objects of small consequence even to themselves. On the contrary, if the bestower will become their treasurer, and accumulate for them, and thus convert the shillings which he might otherwise distribute, into a single benefaction of a guinea, they would rarely, probably never, break so considerable a sum for any of those trifling objects upon which the shillings separately given would all have been expended.

It will commonly add much to the benefit of such a distribution, if it should also be made at stated and expected times, so that the object of the beneficence might calculate beforehand. In this case he would, on the one hand, endeavour to supply his intermediate wants, and, on the other, would regularly fix upon an important purpose for which the expected benefaction would be laid out. In this manner they will learn to overcome their own want of economy, and acquire a degree of prudence in the management of their pecuniary concerns, to which otherwise they would be strangers through life.

5. *The best mode of communicating pecuniary assist-*

ance to such sufferers as have sufficient health and capacity, is to employ them

By this I intend, that we should furnish them with such means and such directions, as may be necessary to enable them to earn so much of their subsistence as can be brought within their reach by their own industry. Most of the poor would choose to support themselves, if it were in their power. He who puts it in their power delivers them from the painful consciousness of being burdensome to others; places them in a degree of independence, which is rationally pleasant; and in many instances enables them ultimately to earn more than a mere subsistence; and thus teaches them in the only effectual manner how to provide for themselves. In addition to all this, he brings them within the pale of character and reputation, and renders them useful to themselves and to mankind. In this particular, men of active and extensive business are furnished by Providence with peculiar advantages for becoming important benefactors to mankind as well as to individuals.

6. Our beneficence is often rendered to others much more usefully by personal exertions in their behalf, than by mere contribution of money.

There are innumerable cases of suffering, of which property cannot become the relief. Of this nature are those of sickness, pain, sorrow, disgrace, decrepitude, friendlessness, the necessity of countenance, a broken heart, and all that variety of anguish of spirit which respects our salvation. In all these, and in many other cases, the kindness needed is not pecuniary bounty, but those good offices which are suited to the nature of the suffering. Very many persons, perhaps almost all those who are in easy circumstances, much more willingly contribute their property than their personal services. To give a small sum of money, is often considered as an easy piece of self-denial, when a personal effort is regarded as a serious sacrifice.

But it is to no purpose to contribute money for the relief of distress, where we know that it will not pro-

duce the relief. The duty demanded by our circumstances, the benefit needed by those whom we profess to befriend, is always that of course which will effectuate relief for the calamity actually endured. Every thing else here is comparatively of no value.

Let it also be remembered, that the benefit communicated in these cases by our good offices is real, while that intended by our bounty is imaginary ; and that, in proportion to the self-denial which our kindness may demand, will be the amiableness and the worth of the disposition by which it is rendered. Even in cases where the relief of suffering is to be accomplished by pecuniary bounty, it will often be true that he who in his own person solicits contributions, is a greater benefactor than any of those who furnish them, even without supposing him to contribute at all.

But in a great multitude of cases, some of which have been specified, property cannot be the means of relief. Property cannot watch with the sick, nor administer remedies for their diseases, nor heal a wounded spirit, nor comfort mourners, nor restore resolution to the discouraged, nor withdraw a wanderer from vice and ruin, nor place his feet in the way of life. If we are really charitable, we shall endeavour to do all these and the like kind offices. If we are unwilling to do them, it is because we are destitute of charity.

7. We are bound to make this communication of beneficence a part of our system of life.

When once it is determined by us, that the performance of this duty is one great end for which we live, and that a considerable part of our time, our labours, and our substance is to be employed in this manner, much of our native reluctance to it may be regarded as being overcome. Whatever we do habitually, however irksome it may be at first, will in the end be willingly done. At first we think of little beside the difficulties which will attend the performance. As we proceed, the employment itself gradually becomes pleasant ; and we also realize

more and more the various pleasures by which it is attended. At the same time, whenever any conduct becomes part of our system of action, as we regularly expect to adopt it, we make a regular and constant preparation for the performance. In the present case, for example, when it has become an habitual object to bestow upon the poor pecuniary bounty; we shall so regulate our expenses as continually to be in possession of the means of this bounty, and shall not be unprovided when the occasions for charity occur. If personal assistance is the beneficence demanded; we shall so adjust our business, as to be able without serious inconvenience to perform the kind offices which this duty may require. Universally, of whatever nature the good to be done may be, we shall in this case be prepared to do it, and that as a part of the business of life.

On the contrary, he who performs acts of charity only in a desultory and occasional manner, will find himself unready to fulfil such of its demands as he will acknowledge to be real and obligatory, will halt between the duty and the sacrifice which it will cost, and will often persuade himself, in opposition to the first dictates of his conscience, that in the existing case he may be lawfully excused.

In addition to what has been said, it ought to be diligently remembered, that we were not made for ourselves, that we were made for the glory of our Creator and the good of our fellow-creatures; and that it is our supreme interest, as well as our indispensable duty, to fulfil this exalted end of our being. We are ever to keep before our eyes, that it is always unnecessary and usually undesirable for us to be rich; that when in the course of honest industry we become rich, we are peculiarly obligated to 'do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;' and that, in this manner, we shall 'lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come.' Still farther we are bound to realize, that our property belongs to God, that to us it is a mere gift of his bounty; that

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there is no good in it, unless we gratefully rejoice in the loving-kindness of the Giver, and do good in our life; and that then only we are entitled to 'enjoy the good of all our labour.' Finally, we are to realize that God is especially glorified when good is done to mankind.

If these interesting considerations are continually kept in view and brought home to the heart, it seems hardly possible that we should not be well prepared to perform all those actions which are included under the comprehensive name of charity.

IV. *Among the numerous motives to the performance of this duty, I shall select the following:—*

1. *We shall preserve ourselves from the deplorable passion of avarice.*

Cast back your eyes for a moment on the exhibition made of this attribute in the preceding Discourse, and tell me, Which of you is willing to subject himself to the miserable bondage of its domination? Which of you is willing to sustain the character, which of you to perform the actions, which to receive the reward? Can any character be more unfit for a rational being, more odious or more contemptible in itself, or, in proportion to its means, more mischievous to mankind? How emphatically true is it, that 'the love of money is the root of all evil;' that those, who love it, 'fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition;' that they are 'seduced from the faith; and pierce themselves through' (or, as in the original, *all around*) 'with many sorrows?' Let every one of you who is a child of God, let every one of you who intends to become a child of God, 'flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, and love.'

But nothing seems better fitted to prevent, or to root out, this wretched passion, than an habitual performance of the duties of charity. He who accustoms himself to give freely, and to act kindly to others, especially to the poor and suffering, from

whom he can rationally hope for nothing again, can scarcely fail in the end of being willing to give, and to give liberally. For a truly charitable man to be covetous is impossible.

Let me add, that in this manner also we shall be secured from the imputation of avarice. Nothing will sooner or more perfectly destroy a good name than this imputation; nothing more certainly awaken the hatred and the scorn of our fellow-men; nothing more certainly preclude us from any rational or desirable influence over them.

2. *By a faithful performance of these duties, we shall secure to ourselves the esteem of our fellow-men.*

‘A good name,’ says Solomon, ‘is better than great riches.’ Among all the things which are done by man, nothing more certainly assures us of the best reputation, than a regular and cheerful performance of charitable offices. Not only do the wise and good, but men of all inferior descriptions also, readily acknowledge the worth of beneficence, peculiarly when administered to such as are in distress. Excellence in other forms is often doubted, denied, disrelished, and calumniated. In this it seems always to be respected. The character acknowledged is not merely good; it is the best. The hardest heart acknowledges its worth; and the most niggardly tongue vibrates in its praise. How often, when the eye is wandering over published accounts, even fictitious ones, of beneficence administered to the poor and friendless, does the tear of tenderness and sympathy start, and the bosom warm with pleasure at this display of evangelical excellence! Whose voice does not delight to sound the praises of Howard; and how little do nobles, heroes, and princes appear at his side!

In the possession of such a character, we of course acquire a happy influence over our fellow-men; and this influence is the chief means of our usefulness. An individual acting alone can do little towards promoting the well-being of his fellow-men; while the same individual, by means of extensive influence

may become an important public blessing. Although therefore reputation, considered merely as a gratification of our pride, is of little consequence; its value, as the means of usefulness, is inestimable. In this view, 'a good name' is indeed 'rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour than silver and gold.'

3. *In the performance of these duties, we ensure to ourselves the approbation of our own consciences.*

This is always the consequence of performing our duty; yet there are some duties from which it springs in a peculiar degree. Among these, the administration of charity obviously holds a high station. As there is something eminently lovely in beneficence to the eyes of those who look on, so it is seen to be thus lovely by the eye of the benefactor. It is a glorious character of God, that 'he is good, that he doeth good, and that his tender mercies are over all his works.' This character we never so directly and peculiarly resemble, as when we do good with the spirit of the gospel. Of this resemblance, and the beauty of it, the mind is conscious of course and surveying the divine image instamped upon itself, beholds its lustre and loveliness with a delight which is independent, serene, and incomparably superior to every thing which the world is able to give or to take away.

4. *It secures the approbation of God.*

Concerning this truth there can be no debate. Multitudes indeed suppose nothing else to be necessary for this purpose; and seem willing to consider it as supplying all deficiencies of repentance, faith, and love to God, even when their beneficence is that of the hands, and not that of the heart. This undoubtedly is an error, and a very dangerous one. Still it is certain, that evangelical beneficence will secure to us the divine approbation; for he in whom it is found will certainly possess every other evangelical attribute. In an eminent degree is it obedience to very numerous commands of the gospel and, in a degree no less eminent, is it an object of

scriptural promises. 'Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth: the Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. He hath dispersed; he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever.'

5. *It is a striking resemblance to the character of the Redeemer.*

'Jesus Christ,' saith St. Peter, 'a man who went about doing good.' How exact a description is this of our Saviour's life! To pass by the divine doctrines which he taught, how entirely were all his miracles directed to this single end! He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he comforted the sorrowful, cleansed the leprous, cast out devils, and restored soundness to the lame, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead; and still more wonderful were his sufferings. All the contradictions which he endured from sinners, all the agonies of the garden and the cross, and all the humiliation of the grave, he endured solely for the purpose of rescuing wretched apostates, condemned and ruined, from final perdition. How lovely, how glorious a character! 'Mine elect,' saith God the Father, 'in whom my soul delighteth:—' my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' What angel would not delight to make such a character his pattern! What Christian would not follow his example!

6. *It will secure a divine reward.*

It is a most remarkable fact, that in our Saviour's account of his administrations at the final day, he has founded his approbation of good men, and their everlasting reward, upon their performance of the duties of charity. 'Come, ye blessed of my Father,' will the Judge of the quick and the dead say to them on his right hand, 'inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick,

and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ; or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ; naked, and clothed thee ; or when saw we thee sick, and in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

On the other hand, the cause expressly assigned for the condemnation of the wicked at the same awful day, is their omission of these very duties. How delightful then will it be, to go from this world with a consciousness that the duties of charity have been all performed by ourselves ! How melancholy, how dreadful, to stand before the Judge with a conviction that they have been all neglected !

SERMON CXXXI.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

A V A R I C E.

They, that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil ; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.—1 TIM. VI. 9, 10.

IN the two preceding Discourses, I examined the nature and benefits of *contentment*, the immediate object of injunction in the tenth command ; and of *charity*, a duty which it obviously implies. The subject which next offers itself to consideration is the *covetousness* which is the immediate object of prohibition in this precept. This I shall discuss under the two

general heads of *avarice* and *ambition*.

The former of these shall occupy the present Discourse.

The spirit of covetousness extends indeed both its views and desires to the objects of sensuality, as well as to wealth and distinction. But, beside that these are not commonly considered as the proper objects of covetousness, I have already discoursed so extensively concerning several sensual gratifications, as to render it unnecessary again to bring them into a particular examination.

In the present discussion, it is my design to consider,

I. *The folly,*

II. *The guilt,*

III. *The mischiefs of avarice.*

All these subjects are directly mentioned in the text. Of those, who 'will be rich,' it is said, that they 'fall into many foolish lusts.' These lusts are also said to be 'hurtful,' and to 'drown men in destruction and perdition.' It is farther said, that 'the love of money is the root of all evil. Some, who had coveted after it,' in or before the days of St. Paul, he declares, 'erred,' or were seduced, 'from the faith; and pierced themselves through' (*περσεντες εαυτους*, pierced themselves all around) with many sorrows.' Here we find the *folly*, *guilt*, and *mischiefs* of *avarice* asserted in the strongest as well as the most explicit terms. What is thus testified by St. Paul, the common sense of mankind has in every age and country attested in the most ample manner. All nations, wherever wealth has existed, have declared covetousness to be eminently foolish, sinful, and mischievous. A stronger specimen of this testimony can hardly be given, than in the appropriation of the name *Miser* (a wretch), to the avaricious man.

The proofs which I shall give, at the present time, of the *folly of avarice*, are the following:—

1. *The pursuits of the avaricious man are attended by many unnecessary anxieties, labours, and distresses.*

The mind of an avaricious man is always the seat of eager desire. So peculiarly is this the fact, that

the words *covetous* and *covetousness*, although originally signifying any inordinate desire, denote in common usage, when unqualified by other phraseology, the inordinate desire of *wealth*; and are equivalent to the words *avaricious* and *avarice*. This fact, more strongly than any reasoning could, proves that the love of riches is usually, in an eminent degree, inordinate. But whenever our desires sustain this character, the mind becomes proportionally *anxious*. Our attainment of the coveted object is, in most cases, necessarily uncertain. Between the fear of losing, and the hope of acquiring it, the mind is necessarily suspended. As these desires are *continually* exerted, the suspense becomes, of course, continual also. A state of suspense is always a state of anxiety. Here the anxiety is regularly great and distressing; because the desires are incessant, eager, and sufficiently strong to control all the powers of the mind.

But this anxiety is unnecessarily suffered. All the prudence and industry which can be lawfully exerted for the acquisition of wealth, may be employed, and all the property which can be lawfully acquired, may be gained, without the exercise of a single avaricious feeling, and without the sufferance of a single avaricious anxiety. The contented man often becomes rich to every desirable degree, amid the full possession of serenity, peace, and self-approbation.

Nor are the labours of the avaricious man of a less unfortunate nature. His mind is continually strained with effort. The strength of his desires goads him into an unceasing course of contrivances to gratify them. His thirst for property drives him to an incessant formation of plans by which he hopes to acquire it. The fear of lessening what he has acquired hurries him into an endless and wearisome train of exertions to secure himself from losses. Thus, a course of mental toil is voluntarily assumed by him, resembling, not the independent labours of a freeman, but the drudgery of a slave. The mind

of an old miser is thus in a continual state of travail, and struggles through life under the pressure of an iron bondage.

A mind hurried by eager schemes of effort is always a tyrant to the body. Accordingly the bodily labours of the miser commence before the dawn, worry him through the day, and scarcely permit him to lie down at night. A mere dray-horse, he is destined to a course of incessant toil. The only changes of life to him are from dragging loads, to bearing burdens; and, like those of the dray-horse, they are all borne and dragged for the use of others.

To the pains springing hourly from this unintermittent toil are added the daily reproaches of conscience; the sufferings of disease and accident, to which such a life is peculiarly exposed; the contempt of those around him; the denial of their pity to his sufferings, and their universal joy in his mortification.

2. *The wishes of the avaricious man are followed by innumerable disappointments.*

The property which he covets he often fails to acquire. His plans, although formed with his utmost sagacity, and with extreme care, are not unfrequently frustrated. His debtors become bankrupt. His hard bargains are avoided. His deeds, or other obligations, are defective. His agents are often unskilful, often unfaithful; and while they are employed merely because they will serve him at a cheap rate, frequently make their service distressingly expensive. Storms also will blow, in spite of his wishes. Shelves will spread, and rocks will stand in the way of his ships, as well as in the way of others. The gain which he looks for will often only appear to excite his most anxious desires, and mock him with the most painful disappointment.

Scarcely less is he wounded, when the gain in view is partially acquired. The advantage of a bargain, the amount of a crop, or the profits of a voyage, are less than his expectations have promised. As his calculations are all set high, and made by the hand of ardent desire, they of course overrun his suc-

cess. But moderate success frustrates immoderate desire little less than absolute disappointment.

Should we even suppose his success to equal his expectations, he will be still disappointed. He covets wealth, for the good which he supposes it will confer. This good is not the supply of his wants, the communication of conveniences, or the ministration of luxuries. Luxuries and conveniences he has not a wish to enjoy; and his wants might be supplied by a tenth, a twentieth, or even a hundredth part of what he possesses. Personal importance, influence, and distinction, constitute eminently the good which the miser expects from his gains. But this object he often fails to accomplish; and, in the measure which he expects, always. Some of those around him will, in spite of both his wishes and labours, be richer than himself. Others will possess superior understanding; and others superior excellence. Some or all of these will acquire more reputation, weight, or influence than himself. Thus he is compelled to see men who are his rivals, whom he hates, or whom he either dreads as being more, or despises as being less, rich than himself, raised above him in the public estimation; while his own mind is left to the ranklings of envy, and the miseries of disappointment. At the same time, he is frequently stung by the severities of well-founded censure, lashed by the hand of scorn, and set up as a mark for the shafts of derision. He is also without friends, without commiseration, without esteem. He who would gain esteem, must deserve it. He who would have friends must shew himself friendly. He who would find commiseration, must commiserate others.

3. *The good which the avaricious man actually gains is uncertain.*

Wealth is the only good which he seeks. If this then is lost, he loses his all. Nothing can be more unwise than to centre all our views, wishes, and labours in uncertain good. But the good of the miser is eminently uncertain. No truth is more attested by

the experience of man, than that 'riches make to themselves wings as an eagle, and fly away towards heaven.' The dangers to which wealth is exposed are innumerable. The schemes of its possessor, in spite of all human sagacity, will at times prove abortive. Flaws will at times be found in the written securities with which he attempts to guard his gains. The formation of them will often be committed to unskilful, because they are cheap, hands. Incompetent and unfaithful persons will at times be trusted, because they offer peculiarly advantageous terms. Houses, notes, bonds, and deeds will at times be consumed by fire. Crops will fail. Cattle will die. Ships will be captured, or providentially lost. The owner and his family will be sick. Debtors will abscond, or become bankrupt, and swindlers will run away with loans, which, in spite of avaricious prudence, they have obtained. In every case of such a nature, the miser's regrets are throes; his disappointments are agonies. The instinctive language of his heart is, 'Ye have taken away my gods; and what have I more?'

But avarice often amasses wealth for its heirs. Solomon hated all the labour which he had undergone to acquire riches, because he should leave them 'to the man who should come after him;' and knew not 'whether he would be a wise man, or a fool.' This uncertainty attends every man who amasses wealth. His destined heir or heirs may be wise and prudent; inclined to such expenses only as are useful; and prepared to preserve their inheritance undiminished for those who shall come after them. But they may die before they receive their patrimony, and leave it to the possession of prodigals, to men who will expend it for purposes which the original owner most abhorred; and in a manner so rapid and wanton, as would, if he were living, scarcely leave him the possession of his reason. The intention of all men who lay up property for their children, is unquestionably to do them good. How often is this intention defeated! The property ac-

cumulated is designed to make them rich. How often is it the very means of making them poor? It is bequeathed to make them happy. How often is it the cause of their ruin. How often is a splendid inheritance the source of idleness, profusion, negligence, gambling, rash adventure, and speedy beggary! To harass one's self through life, merely to promote these miserable ends, is certainly, if any thing is, 'vanity and vexation of spirit.'

4. *The avaricious man incapacitates himself to enjoy the very good which he seeks.*

In order to enjoy any kind of good, it is indispensable that we should experience some degree of contentment, at least during the period of enjoyment. But 'he that loveth silver, will never be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase.' The desire of gain enlarges faster than the most successful and romantic acquisitions; and, were pounds to be accumulated as rapidly as the most favoured children of fortune multiply pence, the eager mind would still overleap the limits of its possessions, and demand new additions to its wealth with accelerated avidity. As these desires increase, the fear, the reluctance to enjoy what is accumulated, are proportionally increased. The miser, instead of furnishing himself with more gratifications, and enjoying them more highly, as his means of indulgence are increased, lessens them in number and degree; and tastes them with a more stinted parsimonious relish. His habitation, his dress, his food, his equipage, all become more decayed, mean, and miserable continually; because he feels less and less able to afford, first conveniences, then comforts, and then necessities. 'Although he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof.' A rich miser who lives like a beggar, is only a beggar dreaming that he is rich.

II. *The guilt of avarice may be illustrated in the following manner:—*

1. *The disposition is in itself grossly sinful.*

This truth the Scriptures have exhibited with peculiar force. 'Covetousness,' saith St. Paul, 'is idolatry.' Every person who has read his Bible knows that idolatry is marked in the Scriptures as pre-eminent sin; as peculiarly 'the abominable thing,' which God says, 'My soul hates.' Its enormity I have illustrated in a former Discourse. I will therefore be unnecessary to expatiate upon it here. I shall only observe, as we are taught by St. Paul, that 'no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.'

Common sense has long since pronounced the avaricious man to be an idolater, in the adage, proverbially used to describe his character; that 'he makes gold his god.' Plainly, he prefers wealth to every other object; and consecrates his heart, his talents, and his time to the single purpose of becoming rich. To this object he evidently postpones the real God, and neither renders to him, nor, while avarice predominates, can render his affections, or his services. With such 'love of the world,' the 'love of the Father' cannot be united. But how sordid, how shameful, how sinful, is it thus to worship and serve a contemptible creature more than the Creator, 'who is blessed for ever! Amen.'

By this disposition he in whom it dwells is unfitted for all his duty to God. Our duty to God is performed, if performed at all, from that supreme love to him which is enjoined in the first and greatest command of the moral law. But the heart of the avaricious man cannot thus love God, because he renders this love to the world. He cannot worship God, because he worships gold. He cannot serve God, because he serves Mammon. Thus his heart is alienated from his Maker, and his life employed in a continual and gross impiety.

2. Avarice speedily destroys the tenderness both of the heart and of the conscience.

To be 'without natural affection' is, in the estimation of the Scriptures, as well as that of common

sense, to be eminently and hopelessly sinful. But nothing sooner hardens the native feelings of the heart than the love of riches. Open to *them*, the soul is sealed up to every thing else, and loves nothing in comparison with them. Soon and easily it becomes callous to all the objects of tenderness and endearment; forgets the neighbour, the poor, and the distressed; and neglects even its nearest friends and relations. To such a heart poverty petitions, distress pleads, and nature cries in vain. Its ears are deaf, its eyes blind, and its hands closed. In vain the unhappy petitioner approaches with the hope of finding relief. Instead of meeting with the tear of sympathy, and the gentle voice of compassion, he is driven from the gate by the insults of a slave, and the growl of a mastiff.

With tenderness of feeling vanishes also *tenderness of conscience*; that inestimable blessing to man; the indispensable means of piety and salvation. The continual increase of the appetite for wealth continually overcomes its remonstrances, and gradually diminishes its power. Conscience, often vanquished, is vanquished with ease. Avarice accomplishes this defeat every day and every hour. Soon therefore its voice, always disregarded, ceases to be heard. Then religion and duty plead with as little success as friendship and suffering pleaded before. All the motives to repentance, faith, and obedience lose their power; and might with equal efficacy be addressed to blocks and stones.

To the miser nothing is of any value but wealth. But wealth conscience cannot proffer, the Scriptures do not ensure, God does not promise. Therefore conscience, the Scriptures, and God are of no value to him. To riches, to bargains, to loans, to amassing, to preserving, he is alive. To reformation, to piety, to salvation, he is dead.

3. *The life of the avaricious man is an unceasing course of injustice.*

It is an unceasing course of *fraud*. Few such men fail of being guilty of open dishonesty, the n

tural and almost necessary consequence of a covetous disposition. Should we suppose him to escape this iniquity, and, fixing his standard of morality as high as any avaricious man knows how to fix it, to make the law of the land his rule of righteousness, he will still live a life of fraud. His only scheme of action is uniformly to get as much as that law will permit; and it will permit, because it cannot prevent, frauds innumerable. Every hard bargain, as I have formerly observed, is a fraud: and the bargains of this man, unless his weakness forbids, or Providence prevents, are all hard. But his life is spent in making such bargains; and is therefore spent in fraud.

It is also an unceasing course of *oppression*. The bargains which I have already specified are not fraudulent only, they are cruel. They are made, in innumerable instances, with the poor and suffering; and fill his coffers out of the pittance of want, and the gleanings of the widow and the fatherless. With an iron hand, he grasps the earnings of the necessitous; and ‘snatches and devours on the right hand, and on the left.’

In this oppression *his own family take their full share*. His coffers indeed are rich; but himself and his family are poor. Often are they denied even the comforts of life; and always that education and those enjoyments which wealth is destined to supply. Their food is mean and stinted. Their clothes are the garb of poverty. The education which they receive is such as forms a menial character, and fits them only for a menial condition. Their comforts are measured out to them, not in streams, but in solitary drops. When they are settled in life, the means of business and enjoyment are supplied to them with so parsimonious a hand, as to cut them off from every useful plan, and every comfortable expectation. If hope at any time shines upon them, it shines only to be overcast. By their parent they are continually mocked with the cup of Tantalus: which they are permitted indeed to touch, but not to taste. When he leaves the world, and is compelled

to impart his possessions to them, they find themselves, by a stinted education and shrivelled habits, rendered wholly unable either to enjoy their wealth themselves, or make it useful to others.

4. *The covetous man is almost of course a liar.*

The great design of the avaricious man, which fills his heart, spreads through his life, and controls all his conduct, is to get as much as he can; at least so far as it can be done legally, and safely. This is the utmost point of honesty ever aimed at by an avaricious man. If this be attained, such a man always regards himself as being really honest. But in this he is wonderfully deceived. His favourite principle conducts him regularly to unceasing fraud, and regularly issues in a course of lying. As it is his aim always to sell for more and buy for less than justice will permit, he of course represents the value of his own commodities to be greater, and that of his neighbour's to be less, than the truth. As he spends most of his life in buying and selling, or in forming schemes to buy and sell, in this manner; he employs no small part of it either in actual or intentional lying. To compass the same object also he is equally tempted to misrepresent his own circumstances, the state of the markets, the quality and quantity, the soundness, weight, and measure of the commodities which he sells; and, so far as may be, of those which he buys. Thus the horse, the house, or the land which he is about to buy is, according to his own account, poor, defective, and of little value. But as soon as he chooses to sell it, it has, according to his own account also, wonderfully changed its nature; and become excellent, free from every defect, and of very superior value. Yet, with this chain of falsehoods always hanging about his neck, the miserable wretch is frequently so blind as not to mistrust that he is a liar.

5. *All these, and all other sins of the avaricious man speedily become gross and rank habits.*

I know of no disposition which sooner or more effectually makes a man blind to his own character

than avarice. The miser rarely, if ever, mistrusts that he is a sinner. He thinks himself only a poor man. He does not dream that he is an oppressor, a liar, and a cheat; but merely supposes himself to be prosperous, sagacious, and skilled in business. With these views he will naturally entertain no thoughts of repentance; and no suspicion that it is necessary for him. His conscience, it is to be remembered, has in the mean time lost its power to remonstrate and to alarm. His heart also is so entirely engrossed by schemes of accumulating wealth, or is rather so absolutely possessed by the demon of avarice, as to have neither time nor room for the admission of a thought concerning reformation. He is left therefore to the domination of this wretched appetite; and becomes fixed and hardened in all his sins, without a check, and without resistance. There is probably no more obdurate heart than that of avarice; and no more hopeless character. Every passage to it appears to be closed up, except one; and that is opened only to gain.

III. *The mischiefs of avarice are innumerable.*

A few of them only can be even mentioned at the present time. These I shall consider as *personal*, *private*, and *public*.

Among the *personal* mischiefs of avarice are to be reckoned all the *follies* and all the *sins* which have been already specified, so far as their influence terminates in the avaricious man himself. They are not sins and follies only; they are mischiefs also; as indeed is every other sin and folly. As mischiefs, their combined efficacy is very great, malignant, and dreadful; such as would be deliberately encountered by no man but a profligate; such as would make a considerate man tremble.

To these let me add the guilt and misery of *discontentment* and *envy*. However fast the wealth of the avaricious man may increase, to whatever size the heaps may swell, his accumulations always lag behind his wishes. Indeed, they never keep pace with what he feels to be *his due*. In his own view he

has a right to be rich ; and he regards the providence of God as under a species of obligation to make him rich. To these claims his wishes furnish the only limit. and whenever they are not satisfied, as is always the case, unless in the moment of some distinguished success ; he becomes fretful, impatient, and angry at the dispensations of Providence. He may not, indeed, accuse God of injustice, face to face. But he murmurs at his Providence under the names of *fortune, chance, luck, the state of things, and the course of events.* Against these, and through these against God, his complaints are loud, vehement, bitter, full of resentment, and full of impiety.

Amid the troubles derived from this source he cannot fail, whenever he looks around him, to find some men happier, as well as more prosperous, at least in some respects, than himself. This man may be richer. That, though inferior in wealth, may possess a piece of land, a house, a servant, which, although a darling object of his covetous desires, he may be unable to obtain. A third may have more reputation. A fourth may have more influence. A fifth may be better beloved. Towards any or all of these, his envy may be directed with as malignant a spirit as his murmuring against God. It is not easy to conceive of a mind more wretched, or more odious than that which makes itself miserable at the sight of happiness enjoyed by others ; and pines at the thought of enjoyments which are not its own. This spirit is the vulture of Prometheus, preying unceasingly upon his liver ; which was ever renewed, that it might be for ever devoured.

With envy, discontentment, its twin-sister, perpetually dwells. The wretch, whose heart is the habitation of both, is taught and influenced by them to believe, that God is his enemy, because he does not minister to his covetousness ; and that men are his enemies, because they enjoy the good which God has given them. Even happiness itself, so delightful where it is seen, to a benevolent eye, is a source of anguish only to him, unless when locked up in his own coffers.

The grovelling and gross *taste* of the miser is in my view also eminently pernicious. To be under the government of such a taste is plainly to be cut off from all rich and refined enjoyment. The miser endeavours to satiate himself upon the dross of happiness. But he neither discerns nor seeks for the 'fine gold.' The delicious viands proffered to intelligent and immortal minds by the beneficence of God, are lost upon a palate which can satiate itself upon garbage. The delightful emotions of contentment, gratitude, and complacency towards his Maker, the sweets of a self-approving mind, the charming fruition of tenderness and sympathy, the refined participation of social good, and the elevated satisfaction which springs instinctively from the beneficent promotion of that good, can never find an entrance into a heart, all the avenues to which are barred up by the hand of avarice. But to lose these blessings is to lose infinitely.

At the same time, *the miser wastes of course his day of probation.* His life is wholly occupied by the pursuit of wealth. Of sin and ruin, of holiness and heaven, he has not time even to think. His life is too short for the accomplishment of his main object. Suns for him rise too late, and set too soon. Too rapidly do his days succeed each other, and too early do they terminate their career. His last sickness arrests him while he is counting his gold; and death knocks at his door, while he is in the midst of a gainful bargain. Thus he is hurried and goaded through the journey of life by his covetousness; and finds no opportunity to pause, and think upon the concerns of his soul; no moment in which he can withdraw his eye from gain, and cast a look towards heaven. 'It is easier,' saith our Saviour, 'for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.'

Thus it is evident, that 'they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition;'—that 'the love of money is the root

of all evil;—and that ‘such, as covet after it, pierce themselves through with many sorrows.’

The private mischiefs of avarice are those which affect unhappily the interests of families and neighbourhoods.

To these little circles, formed to be happy, and actually the scenes of the principal happiness furnished by this world, the miser is a common nuisance. To his family he presents the miserable example of covetousness, fraud, oppression, falsehood, and impiety; and the most humiliating and distressing living picture of an abandoned worldling, forgetting his God and forgotten by him; worshipping gold, ever craving and devouring, but never satisfied; denying himself and his household the comforts of life, and imparting to them the necessaries only in crumbs and shreds; living a life of perpetual meanness and debasement; wasting the day of probation; ‘treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath;’ advancing onward to his final account, without an effort or a thought of preparation for this tremendous event; and, all this while irresistibly endeared to them by the strong power of natural affection.

On the *neighbourhood* the miser inflicts the complicated, harassing, and intense, evils of *continually repeated fraud and oppression*. Wherever such a man plants himself, sufferings spring up all around him. To the young, the ignorant, the thoughtless, and the necessitous, he lends money at exorbitant interest, and with tenfold security. The payment he discourages, until the amount has become sufficient to enable him with a suit to enclose their whole possessions in his net. To the poor and suffering also he sells at unconscionable prices the necessaries of life. Notes, bonds, and mortgages given by persons of the same description, he buys at an enormous discount. Of estates left intestate he watchfully seeks, and with art and perseverance obtains, the administration. When others are obliged to buy, he sells; and when others are obliged to sell, he buys. In this manner his loans are almost instantaneously doubled and property mortgaged to him for a tenth part of its

value is swallowed up. The estates of widows and orphans melt away before his breath, as the snow beneath the April sun. The possessions of all around him move only towards his den. The farm and the house, the garden and the cottage, the herd on the one hand, and the widow's cow and ten sheep on the other, go down together into this open sepulchre. Over the miserable beings who cannot escape his fangs he reigns with a despotic and wolfish dominion. All around him tremble at his nod ; and, should any one retain sufficient energy to question his pleasure, or dispute his control, he points his eyes to the jail, and hushes every murmur to silence, and every thought to despair.

Nor does he less injure *society*, although the injury is ordinarily less observed, as being less felt, *by corrupting both his family and his neighbourhood*. His example imboldens, his skill instructs, and his success allures those who are witnesses of his life to pursue the same course of villany and oppression. All the sagacious sharpen their cunning by his practical lessons. The intrepid become daring by his example. The greedy become ravenous by his success. Thus the spirit of avarice is caught, its villainies are multiplied, and a poisonous scion engrafted upon every stock in the neighbourhood. His own sons, if not broken down by his hard-handed parsimony, or induced by their sufferings to detest it, and rush into the opposite extreme of profusion, become proficient in all the mysteries of fraud and oppression : not instructed and led only, but drilled into the eager, shrewd, and gainful pursuit of wealth. From him they learn to undervalue all rules of morality, except the law of the land, to violate the dictates of compassion, to burst the bonds of conscience, and to regard with indifference and contempt the will of God. In his house, as in a second Newgate young men soon become old in villany ; and, with a heart prematurely hardened into stone, and hands trained to mischief by transferred experience, are turned loose to prey upon the vitals of society.

The *public mischiefs* of avarice are not less numerous; and are of incomprehensible magnitude. It was one of the glorious characteristics of the men recommended by Jethro to Moses, to fill the stations of rulers that 'they hated covetousness:' a characteristic indispensable to him, who would rule justly, and be a 'minister of God for good to his people.' When avarice ascends the chair of state, mingles with the councils of princes, seats herself on the bench of justice, or takes her place in the chamber of legislation; nay, when she takes possession of subordinate departments, particularly of those which are financial in the administration of government, her views become extended, and her ravages terrible. The man over whom she has established her dominion sees, even in the humblest of these stations, prospects of acquiring wealth opening suddenly upon him, of which he before never formed a conception. In the mysterious collection of revenues, the mazy management of taxes, the undefined claims for perquisites, the opportunities of soliciting and receiving customary bribes, and in the boundless gulf of naval and military contracts, he beholds new means and new motives for the exercise of all his talents, fraud, and rapacity, and for the speedy acquisition of opulence, crowding upon him at once. The alluring scene he surveys with the same spirit with which a vulture eyes the field of blood. Every thing on which he can fasten his talons here becomes his prey. The public he cheats without compunction; individuals he oppresses without pity. There is sufficient wealth in the world to supply all its inhabitants with comfort. But, when some become suddenly and enormously rich, multitudes must sink into the lowest depths of poverty. To enable a single farmer of revenues, or a single contractor, to lodge in a palace, to riot at the table of luxury, and to roll on wheels of splendour, thousands have sweat blood, and wrung their hands in agony. But what is all this to him? He is rich, whoever else may be poor. He is fed, whoever else may starve. The frauds and ravages of public agents,

which find palliation, countenance, and excuse from the fact that they have become customary, constitute no small part of that oppression which has awakened the groans and cries of the human race, from the days of Nimrod to the present hour.

But avarice is not confined to subordinate agents. Often it ascends the throne, and grasps the sceptre. The evils of which it is the parent in this situation, are fully proportioned to its power, and outrun the most excursive wanderings of imagination. A large part of the miseries entailed on mankind by oppressive taxes at home, and ruinous wars abroad, are created by the lust for plunder. This fiend hurried the Spaniards to America, and stung them into the perpetration of all those cruelties which laid waste the empires of Mexico and Peru. The same foul spirit steered the slave-ships of America and Europe to the African shores; tore from their friends, children, and parents, ten millions of the unoffending natives; transported them in chains across the Atlantic; and hurried them to the grave by oppressive toil, torture, and death. Every where and in every age she has wasted the happiness, wrung the heart, and poured out the blood of man. Relentless as death, and insatiable as the grave, she has continually 'opened her mouth without measure; and the glory, the multitude, and the pomp of cities, states, and empires have descended into the abyss!

SERMON CXXXII.

THE LAW OF GOD. THE DECALOGUE

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

AMBITION.

Mind not high things.—Rom. xii. 16.

THE subject of the preceding Discourse, you may remember, was *avarice*. In the present, I shall con-

tinue the other great exercise of a covetous spirit, viz. *ambition*.

Ambition is an affection of the mind, nearly related to *pride* and *vanity*. *Vanity* is the self-complacency which we feel in the consciousness of being superior to others. *Pride* is the same self-complacency, united with a contempt for those whom we consider as our inferiors. *Ambition* is the desire of obtaining, or increasing, this superiority. *Vanity* usually makes men civil and complaisant. *Pride* renders them rude, imperious, and overbearing. *Vanity* chiefly subjects men to the imputation of weakness, and excites mingled emotions of pity and contempt. *Pride* is often attended with a kind of repulsive dignity; is rather seen to be deserving of contempt, than realized as the object of it; sometimes awakens awe; and always creates hatred and loathing. Vain men are always ambitious; proud men generally but they sometimes appear satisfied with their present envied superiority to all around them. Ambitious men are frequently vain, and sooner or later are always proud. *Vanity* rests chiefly on personal attributes. *Pride*, in addition to these, fastens on every thing which is supposed to create distinction.

This love of superiority is the most remarkable exercise of *covetousness*; and, united with the discontentment and envy by which it is regularly accompanied, appears to constitute the principle corruption of the human mind. It is impossible, without wonder, to observe the modes in which mankind exercise it, and the objects in which it finds its gratification. They are of every kind, and are found every where. We are proud and vain of whatever in our own view, raises us above others; whether a gift of nature, an attainment of our own, or a mere accident. Our pride and vanity are excited by the possession of personal beauty, strength, or agility, by a lively imagination, clear judgment, and tenderness of feeling; by patrimonial wealth, and distinction of family; by the fact, that we live in the same neighbourhood, or even in the same country, with

persons of eminence ; that we know them ; or even that we have seen them. No less commonly are we proud and vain of bodily feats, graceful motions, and becoming manners ; of our gains ; of our learning, inventions, sallies of wit, efforts of eloquence, and exploits of heroism ; of the employments to which we are devoted ; of the taste which we display in our dress, entertainments, manner of living, building, and planting : of our industry, prudence, generosity, and piety ; of our supposed interest in the favour of God ; nay, even of our penitence and humility. We are proud also of the town in which we were born ; of the church to which we are attached ; of the country in which we live ; of the beauty of its surface, the fertility of its soil, and the salubrity of its climate. In a word, these emotions are excited by every thing from which a roving, eager imagination, and a corrupt heart, can elicit the means of personal distinction.

So far as these gratifications of pride are not in our possession, but are yet supposed to be attainable, or so far as they are supposed capable of being increased, when already possessed by us, they become objects of ambition. We eagerly covet them, and labour strenuously to acquire them.

In the humble circles of life, the first, and very frequently the last aim of this desire of superiority, is to rise above those who are in the same humble station. To be the first in a village would, it is said, have been more acceptable to Cæsar himself, than to have been the second in Rome. Most men certainly raise their ambition no higher than this very limited superiority. Neither their views, nor their circumstances permit them to grasp at more extensive and more elevated objects. Persons who move in a larger sphere are apt to look down with contempt and pity, upon the lowly struggles for pre-eminence which spring up in the cottage, and agitate the hamlet, without remembering that they are just as rational, and just as satisfactory, while they are less distressing, and less guilty, than their own more splen-

did and violent efforts to obtain superior consequence.

Minds of a more restless cast, of more expanded views, and more inordinate wishes, never stop voluntarily at such objects as these. The field of distinction is co-extended with the globe. The means by which it may be acquired are endless in their multitude, and their application: and the prize is always ready to crown the victor. It cannot be wondered at, that minds of such a cast should therefore enter the race, and struggle vigorously to gain the prize.

I have remarked, that the means of distinction are endless in their multitude, and their application. The objects from which it is immediately derived are, however, comparatively few. These are chiefly *wealth, splendour, learning, strength of mind, genius, eloquence, courage, place, and power.* To these are to be added, *those remarkable actions which excite the admiration and applause of mankind.*

Among the objects most immediately coveted by ambitious men, especially by those whose ambition has been peculiarly ardent and insatiable, *fame, splendour, place, and power* have held the first rank. *Splendour* has been sought as the means of fixing and dazzling the eyes of their fellow-men; *place and fame* as being partly the means of distinction, and partly the distinction itself; and *power*, as involving in its nature the most decisive and acknowledged superiority; as including *place, fame, and splendour*; and as furnishing all the earthly means of distinction. Into the chase for these objects the great body of mankind have entered, whenever they have found an opportunity. The humble have striven for little places, and the show which was intended to excite the stare of a neighbourhood. The aspiring have aimed at stations of high political consequence, and struggled to set the world agape. Men of limited views have confined their labours to the attainment of a character which should circulate, with respect, through a village; or be engraved with marks of distinction, upon a tomb-stone; while the lofty-minded have demanded a name which should

sound through the world, and awaken the wonder of future generations. The powers of subaltern magistracy have satisfied multitudes; while others have panted to grasp the sceptre of the monarch, and the sword of the conqueror.

The text is directed against this spirit in every form and degree. 'Mind not high things,' says St. Paul to the Christians at Rome. The English word 'mind,' appears very happily to express the meaning of the original term, *φρονουντες*;—*Give not your minds to high things with either attention or desire.* It will be easily seen, that this precept cuts up by the roots both the spirit and the consequences of *ambition*. If we pay not the regard here forbidden to the objects of ambition, it is plain, that we shall neither cherish the spirit, nor pursue the conduct which it dictates. It is hardly necessary to observe, that the precept is directed to *us*, with the same force and obligation as to the Christians at Rome.

The reasons for this prohibition are of the most satisfactory and sufficient nature. As proofs of this truth I shall allege the following:—

1. *Ambition is a primary part of our rebellion against the law and government of God.*

In the first discourse on the tenth command, I observed, that 'an inordinate desire of natural good seems to be the commencement of sin, in a being originally virtuous.' The two great branches of this spirit, or the two great modes in which it operates, are *ambition* and *avarice*. Of these, ambition is without a question the most universal, and the most powerfully operative. It extends to more objects, exerts itself in a far greater variety of modes, occupies, so far as we can judge, the minds of much greater multitudes, is more restless, vehement, and, if possible, more craving. In every just consideration it holds, of course, the primary place.

God has assigned his place and duties, his situation and enjoyments, to every intelligent creature. Impatience with regard to this situation, and the duties which it involves, and those inordinate de-

sires for the stations and allotments of others, out of which impatience and discontentment spring, are, I think, evidently the first risings of the mind against its Maker. In these emotions, the mind declares that its Maker's government is, in its own view, unreasonable and unjust; and that his dispensations are such as to make it justifiably unwilling to regard them with obedience and submission. Thus it arraigns the wisdom and goodness of Jehovah, and withdraws itself from allegiance to the Ruler of all things. Ambition then, the principal branch of this spirit, is the original rebellion against the government of God. Accordingly, the principal ingredient in the first transgression was the ambition of our first parents to become 'as gods, knowing good and evil.' A precept which forbids the assumption of so dangerous a character, and the pursuit of such shameful conduct, can need no additional proof of its rectitude. Still, that which is unnecessary to produce conviction, may be useful for the purpose of making impressions on the heart. I observe therefore,

2. *That ambition is fatal to the happiness of the ambitious man.*

It is proverbially acknowledged, that envy and discontent are only other names for misery. Yet these wretched attributes are always attendant on ambition. No mind can be contented whose desires are ungratified. When those desires are eager, it will be still more discontented; and when he who cherishes those desires, sees the good which he covets in the possession of others, he cannot fail to be envious. But the desires of an ambitious man are always ungratified. That they are eager, needs no proof; and eager desires invariably overrun the measures of the expected enjoyment. When it is attained therefore, it falls regularly short of the expectations and wishes; and thus the mind regularly fails of being satisfied, even when its efforts are crowned with success. The happiness of heaven we are taught, will be commensurate to the utmost

desires of its inhabitants. In this world ardent wishes were never satisfied, nor high hopes ever indulged without disappointment.

The man who enters the career of *political advancement*, never acquires any thing like satisfaction, until he sees, with absolute conviction, that he can gain nothing more. Then indeed he may sometimes sit down quietly, because there is nothing within the horizon of his view to rouse his energy to new hopes, and new exertions. But his quiet is only the stagnant dulness left by disappointment—the paralytic torpor of despair. At first he aims at a humble office. He attains it; and with new eagerness raises his views to one which is higher. He attains this also; and, more eager still, bends his efforts to the acquisition of a third. The acquisition of this only renders more intense his thirst for another. Thus he heats himself, like a chariot-wheel, merely by his own career; and will never cease to pant more and more ardently for promotion, until he finds his progress stopped by obstacles which neither art nor influence can remove.

In the same manner, the candidate for *literary eminence* commences the chase of fame with wishes usually moderate. His first success, however, enlarges his views, and gives new vigour to his desires. Originally, he would have been satisfied with the distinction of being celebrated through a village. Thence he wishes to spread his name through a city, thence through a country, thence through the world, and thence through succeeding generations. Were sufficient means of communication furnished, he would be still more ardently desirous to extend his fame through the planetary regions, and from them to the utmost extent of the stellar system. Were all the parts of this immeasurable career possible, his mind at the end of it would be less contented than at the commencement: and would find, with a mixture of astonishment and agony, that the moment when the strife was terminated, the enjoyment which it promised was gone.

In the pursuit of *power* this truth is still more forcibly illustrated. He who with distinguished political talents devotes himself to this acquisition, hurries with increasing vehemence from petty domination, through all the grades of superior sway, until he becomes a Cromwell, or a king. He who aims at the same object through a military progress, starts from a school, in the character of a cadet, and pushes through the subordinate offices to the command of a regiment, a brigade, a division, and an army. With an ambition, changing from desire into violence, from violence into rage, and from rage into frenzy, he then becomes a consul, a king, an emperor, a monarch of many crowns and many realms; and burns with more intense ardour to go on, subduing and ruling, until the earth furnishes nothing more to be ruled or subdued. Thus the ambition, which at first was a spark, is soon blown into a flame, and terminates in a conflagration. Alexander subdued and ruled the known world. When he had finished his course, he sat down and wept, because there was no other world for him to conquer.

Thus it is plain, that the desires of ambition must ever be ungratified because they increase faster than any possible gratification, and because they increase with a progressive celerity; expanding faster at every future, than at any preceding period of enjoyment. Though 'all rivers run into this ocean,' still it 'is not full.' Although millions continually crowd into this grave, still it says not, 'It is enough.' As avarice would never cease to crave, until it had gorged the riches of the universe; so ambition would never rest, until it has ascended the throne of the Creator.

But, after all its accumulations, there will be wealth which avarice cannot grasp. After all its achievements, there will be heights which ambition cannot climb. Discontentment therefore and murmuring towards the God who will not give the coveted enjoyments, and envy towards the created beings who possess them, will rankle in the insatiable bo-

son, and annihilate the comfort which might otherwise spring from the mass of good already acquired. Ahab on the throne of Israel made himself miserable because he could not lay his hands on the humble vineyard of Naboth. Haman, an obscure captive, was elevated to the second place of power and distinction in the empire of Persia, comprehending at that time almost all the wealth and people of the known world. Yet, at this height of power and splendour, in an assembly of his family and friends, while he was reciting to them 'the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king;' when he said, 'Moreover, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king:' this aspiring, haughty wretch could add, 'Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.'

Our first parents became discontented with their very nature; and under the influence of ambition wished to become 'as gods.' In this monstrous wish they have been often followed by their descendants. Several of the Persian emperors, Alexander the Great, and several of the Roman emperors, claimed divine honours, and demanded sacrifices and libations. The bishops of Rome also have arrogated to themselves the peculiar titles of Jehovah;* and have accordingly granted absolutions of sin, and passports to heaven. Nay, they have abrogated the commands of God, substituted for them contrary precepts, ascended the throne of the Redeemer, assumed the absolute government of his church, permitted and interdicted its worship at their pleasure, claimed the world as their property, and declared all mankind to be their vassals. Beyond all this, they have given, openly and publicly, indul-

* Dominus, Deus noster, Papa.

gences, or permissions to sin. Thus has this 'man of sin,' this 'son of perdition, exalted himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped.' Thus has he, 'as God, sat in the temple of God, shewing himself to be God.'

With all these boundless demands of enjoyment however, this unvarying claim to the exclusive possession of natural good, *ambition never performed a single duty to God, or to man.* To a mind under the control of this passion moral good has no charms, and never becomes the object of either complacency or desire. By such a man his own soul is neglected and forgotten; his fellow-men are neither befriended nor loved; and his God is neither worshipped nor obeyed. All his talents and all his time are employed, with unceasing drudgery, solely to adorn, gratify, and exalt himself. Of this wretched idol he regards the earth as the shrine, and the skies as the temple. To this idol he sacrifices all that he is, and all that he has; and demands from others every offering which *he* can claim, and *they* can give. In homage to this idol he makes every duty give way, and, so far as is in his power, bends all the interests of his fellow-men, and those of the universe, and sets it up as a rival to God himself.

In such a mind how can the sense of duty be kept alive? How can he whose attention is thus fascinated by personal greatness and distinction, whose soul is swollen by the consciousness of personal superiority, find either inclination or leisure for so humble an employment as the performing of his duty? In such a mind how can repentance even begin? How can such a mind comprehend the necessity of relying on the Redeemer for acceptance with God? How can such a mind realize either the importance or the existence of moral obligation; or feel itself bound to obey the will of its Creator? Given up to sin, not from negligence only, from inconsideration, or heedless propensity, but from settled design, from ardent choice, from laborious contrivance, how can such a mind furnish room for the

admission of humility, dependance, the fear of God, submission to his will, contentment, benevolence, equity, or compassion? But where these attributes are not, no duty can be performed.

To his *own family*, indeed, he may be thought to render some of those services which are obviously required both by reason and revelation. All men are commanded to 'provide for those of their own house;' and for his own house the ambitious man actually provides; but not in such a manner as either to perform his own duty, or benefit his family. He labours indeed to make them great; but not to make them wise, just, or good. His children he regards merely as heirs; and not as moral beings, placed during the present life in a state of trial, and destined in a future world to a state of reward. They are therefore taught, governed, influenced, and habituated to no duty, and to no real good. His only object is to invest them with a superiority resembling his own; that they may be decent companions to him while he lives, and inherit his grandeur after his death. They are therefore educated to be in all respects as bad, and in most, worse than himself. The great point of instruction which they receive, from the cradle to the end of his life, is, that all things, human and divine, are to give way to the pursuit of personal distinction. He who educates his family in this manner, cannot be believed to perform of design a single parental duty.

As the ambitious man regards not the real interests of his *own family*, it cannot be believed that he will exercise any greater tenderness for those of his *fellow-men*. I have already remarked, that his mind can furnish no room for the admission of benevolence, equity, and compassion. Without these attributes, it is hardly necessary to observe, no duty to mankind can be performed.

To *God*, this lofty-minded being cannot be expected to render any part of that homage which he demands from all other beings to himself. The only language of his heart, while looking down from the

height to which he imagines himself raised by a series of prosperous efforts, is, 'I will ascend into heaven: I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High.' What submission, what obedience, what worship, can co-exist with this language, and the thoughts from which it springs!

At the same time, *the ambitious man surrounds himself with a host of temptations.* The 'unclean spirit' which originally dwelt in his heart, after having 'gone out, and walked in dry places, seeking rest, and finding none;' after saying, 'I will return to my house, whence I came out;' has already entered it again, 'and found it empty, swept, and garnished,' for his reception. Already has he gone, and taken 'with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself; and they have entered in,' and taken final possession of this convenient residence. His temper, his ruling passion, his course of life, holds out a welcome to every temptation, a call to every sin, a summons to every fiend. His mind is a cage of unclean and furious passions. His purposes demand for their accomplishment the continual intervention of falsehood, fraud, injustice, and cruelty, of impiety and irreligion. The 'sins' of such a man instead of 'following after' him, march before him in regular array; and fight, maraud, and plunder, to fulfil his designs, and to satiate the malignity of those evil spirits who have taken up their final habitation in his bosom.

3. *Ambition is the source of numerous and terrible evils to mankind.*

To comprehend the import of this truth, even in the imperfect manner in which it can be comprehended by us, it would be necessary to recur to the history of the human kind. In all ages, and in all nations, this vast record has been little else than a delineation of the miseries which this malignant passion has produced. It has been a tale of sorrows and groans, and sighs and tears. The earth has rung throughout its immense regions with the melancholy murmur; and the walls of heaven have echoed back 'mourn-

ing, lamentation, and woe.' In a short discourse like this, were it to be changed into a mere vocabulary, the very names of the various sufferings wrought by ambition could not be alphabetically recited. A loose and general specification of a very few of these evils is all that can be accomplished, and therefore all that will be attempted.

Among the several adventurers in the field of distinction, none appears so likely to be harmless, as the *candidate for literary fame*. Learning is an object naturally so useful, and the pursuit of it an employment so quiet, and so little ominous to the public peace, as to induce us very easily to believe that ambition here, at least, would be innoxious and unalarming. Should this, however, be our conclusion, we should find ourselves not a little disappointed. There has been a period, of which but too many traces still remain; a period in which it was fashionable, and therefore an object of ambition, to be a *free-thinker*. Literary men of this description trumpeted so loudly and so incessantly the learning, genius, and philosophy of themselves and their coadjutors; vapoured with so much parade concerning their superiority to superstition, their independence, their liberality, and their exemption from prejudice; and promised so magnificently to rescue their fellow-men from the mists of error, and from the bondage of the mind, that the young, the ignorant, and the silly, dazzled by these splendid pretensions, became ambitious of this distinction, and, without examination or conviction, became free-thinkers in numerous instances, merely that they might have the honour of being united to this cluster of great men. The men themselves, finding that they had become great in the estimation of others by means of these lofty pretensions, went on, and became still greater by increasing their pretensions. By the mere dint of study and reflection, they claimed to understand and teach the will of God concerning the duty and salvation of men; to explore the future designs of Omniscience; and to prescribe rules of justice and propriety, ac-

according to which, if they were to be believed, God himself was bound to conduct his administrations to mankind. The Scriptures they not only discarded but loaded with every calumny, and every insult. The Redeemer of the world they insulted even more grossly than the ancient Jews had done; stained his character with vice and infamy, annihilated his mediation. In the mean time, they poured out a torrent of immoral principles, which they dignified with the name of philosophy, and which they proposed as proper rules to direct the conduct of men. By these principles the faith of mankind was perplexed, their morality unhinged, the distinction between virtue and vice destroyed, the existence of both denied, and the bonds of society cut asunder. Men, of course, were let loose upon each other without the restraint of moral precept, without the checks of conscience, without the fear of God.

The late revolution in France, that volcanic explosion, which deluged the world with successive floods of darkness and fire, had all its materials collected, and all its flames kindled, by men of this description. It is not intended, that literary consequence was the only distinction sought by those who were the prime agents in producing this terrible shock of nature. The lust of power had undoubtedly its full share in bringing to pass this astonishing event. But the desire of fame had its share also. Had not the principles of the French nation been deeply corrupted, their morals dissolved, and their sense of religious obligation destroyed by the pen of sophistry, it is incredible that they should at once have burst all the bonds of nature and morality, transmigrated in a moment from the character of civilized men, into that of wolves and tigers, and covered their country with havoc and blood.

In the career of *political distinction* the progress is usually more rapid, and the change more astonishing. In this career, men of fair moral reputation and decent life, when seized by the disease of ambition, lose suddenly all their former apparent prin

ciples, and are changed at once into office-hunters and demagogues. To obtain a place, or to acquire suffrages, they become false, venal, and treacherous; corrupt and bribe others, and are themselves corrupted and bribed; become panders to men of power, and sycophants to the multitude; creep through the serpentine mazes of electioneering; and sell their souls for a vote or an appointment, in the dark recesses of a cabal.

Their rivals also they calumniate with all the foul aspersions which ingenuity can invent, malignity adopt, obloquy utter, or falsehood convey. The more virtuous, wise, and respected these rivals may be, the more artful and incessant will be their calumnies; because from such men they feel the danger of defeat to be peculiarly alarming. Wisdom and worth therefore are pre-eminently the objects of their hatred and persecution; and fall by the scythe of ambition, as by the scythe of death.

The people at large, in the mean time, are duped by every false tale, which the cunning of these men enables them to invent, terrified by every false alarm, corrupted by every false principle, and misled into every dangerous and fatal measure. Neighbours in this manner are roused to jealousy, hatred, and hostility against neighbours; friends against friends; brothers against brothers; 'the father against the son, and the son against the father.' Truth and justice, kindness, peace, and happiness, fly before these evil genii. Anarchy, behind them, summons her hosts to the civil conflict. Battles are fought with unnatural rage, and fell violence; fields are covered with carnage, and drenched in blood; until there are none left to contend, and the country is converted into a desert. Then despotism plants his throne on the ruins, and stretches his iron sceptre over the miserable relics of the nation. Such was often the progress of political ambition in the ancient and modern republics of Europe; and such, there is no small reason to fear, may one day be its efficacy on our own happy land.

When, instead of the love of peace and political distinction, the passion for power and a determination to rule has taken possession of the heart, the evils have been far more numerous, extensive, and terrible. These evils have been the chief themes of history in all the ages of time. It cannot be necessary, that they should be particularized by me. In some countries of Asia and Africa, the candidate for the throne secures his possession of that proud and dangerous eminence by imprisoning for life every heir, and every competitor; in others, by putting out their eyes; and in others, by murdering them in cold blood. Thus nations are by this infernal passion shut out from the possibility of being governed by mild, upright, and benevolent rulers. Ambition knows no path to a throne but a path of blood, and seats upon it none but an assassin. The adherents to an unsuccessful candidate, although supporting their lawful prince, and performing a duty which God has enjoined, and from which they cannot be released, are involved in his ruin. Prisons are crowded with hundreds and thousands of miserable wretches, guilty of no crime, but that of endeavouring to sustain the government, and resisting usurpation. The axe and the halter, the musket and the cannon, desolate cities and provinces of their inhabitants, and thin the ranks of mankind, to make the seat of the tyrant secure. Not one of these unhappy wretches was probably worse, all were probably better, men than he who bathed his hands in their blood. Cæsar fought fifty-six pitched battles, and killed one million two hundred thousand human beings, to secure to himself the Roman sceptre. More than three millions of such beings have been slaughtered to place the *modern Cæsar* in the undisputed possession of his imperial greatness. To all these miserable sufferers God gave life, and friends, and comforts, with a bountiful hand. Why were they not permitted to enjoy these blessings, during the period allotted to man? Because ambition was pleased to put its veto upon the benevolent dispensation of the Creator; because, to satiate one man,

it became necessary to sacrifice the happiness of millions better than himself; because such a being could be pleased to see himself seated on a throne, although it was erected in a stall of slaughter, and environed by a lake of blood!

SERMON CXXXIII.

THE LAW OF GOD.

MAN'S INABILITY TO OBEY THE LAW OF GOD.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.
—ROM. viii. 7.

IN a long series of Discourses, I have examined the law of God, or *the preceptive part* of the Scriptures. This examination I have distributed into two great divisions: the first involving that summary of the law, which Christ informs us contains the substance of all that is enjoined in the Old Testament; the second, including the Decalogue, in which this summary is enlarged from two precepts to ten; and the duties which it requires are more particularly exhibited. In both of these divisions I have considered, as I found occasion, those comments also of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles, which explain and enforce the various requisitions. The importance of these precepts does more than justify, it demands, the extensive place allotted to them in this system, and the attempts which have here been made, to recommend them to the faith and the obedience of this assembly. The end of all useful speculation is practice. The use of all truth is, ultimately, to regulate the conduct of intelligent beings. Those which are called the doctrines of the Scriptures, are necessary and profitable to mankind in two respects. The first is, that they involve immediate practical duties to a vast extent; the se-

cond is, that by teaching us our character, situation, and relations to God and each other, and the character of God, together with his relations to us, they shew us the foundation of all our duty; the reasons of it, the motives to it, and the manner in which it is to be performed. Most of these things are unfolded to us by the precepts of the Scriptures. They are also attended by some advantages, which are peculiar to themselves. They declare our duty directly; and declare it in the form of law. An authoritative rule is given in each of them, announcing the will of the Lawgiver, requiring our obedience, and prohibiting our disobedience, with rewards and penalties annexed to every precept; not, indeed, annexed to every precept in form; but so as to be always easily present to the eyes of those for whom the law was made. Instruction communicated in this manner, is attended by a force and efficacy of which all other teaching is incapable.

From these considerations arises the importance of inculcating much and often the preceptive part of the Scriptures from the desk. I well know, that preaching of this nature has been opposed and censured by individuals, in several classes of Christians. By Antinomians it may be consistently censured. As these men suppose themselves released from the law of God, as a rule of duty, by the gracious dispensation of the gospel, they have considered the preaching of the law as useless, and even as mischievous. Such sermons as have urged the religious and moral duties of man, they have styled 'legal sermons,' and those who have delivered them, 'legal preachers.' By this language they have intended to insinuate, or openly to declare, that the design of such preaching was the establishment of the doctrine, that we are *justified by works of law*, and the subversion of the evangelical doctrine, that we are *justified by grace*, through faith in the Redeemer. That men have urged obedience to the precepts of the Scriptures with this design, I shall not question, any more than that the same men

have pursued the same design by descanting on the *doctrines* of the Scriptures; and even on those which are purely evangelical. But that inculcating the practical duties which are required of mankind in the Scriptures is, in this sense, legal preaching, I wholly deny. If this is its true character, Christ himself was a legal preacher. This glorious Person in his own discourses has given these precepts, expatiated upon them, and urged obedience to them upon mankind, in a vast multitude of forms, to a great extent, and with unrivalled force and beauty. His sermon on the mount is an illustrious and pre-eminent example of this nature.

This error, it must be owned, has not been confined to Antinomians. Zealous men, enrolled by themselves in other classes of Christians, and deluding themselves, almost of course, by the warmth and haste with which they decide concerning every subject, have entertained similar views, and adopted similar language. I would ask these men, To what purpose were the precepts of the Scriptures given? Why are they so often, so variously, and so forcibly, urged upon mankind? I would ask them, Whether 'all Scripture is,' or is not, 'given by inspiration of God;' and whether it is, or is not, all 'profitable,' not only 'for doctrine, reproof, and correction,' but also 'for instruction in righteousness?' If this inquiry must be answered affirmatively concerning the Old Testament, it cannot be answered negatively concerning the New.

There are those who, on the contrary, confine most or all of their discourses from the pulpit to the *precepts* of the Scriptures; and either wholly, or chiefly, leave the *doctrines* which they contain out of their preaching. Such preachers are equally censurable with their adversaries. No justification can be pleaded for the conduct of either. This separation cannot lawfully be made by either. God has united them; they cannot therefore be disjoined by man. He, who preaches a *part* of the gospel, cannot be said to preach the gospel which Paul preached.

He may not indeed utter doctrines or precepts contrary to those of Paul : but he purposely avoids preaching the whole gospel of Paul ; and, although not guilty of denying or subverting either the truths or the injunctions given us by the apostle, yet, for mutilating the system he merits severe reprehension.

Such preachers as profess the doctrines of the Reformation, have been frequently charged with neglecting to a great degree the duty of inculcating the morality of the gospel. In solitary instances the charge may have been deserved. That it is generally just, there is not a single reason to believe. I regard it as one of those general charges, which fall every where, and rest nowhere ; the refuge of weak and unworthy minds, when they wish to indulge a spirit of bitterness, by uttering severe imputations, and yet dare not fasten them upon individuals, for fear of being required to support them by evidence. So far as my knowledge of preachers extends, those who are sometimes called *evangelical*, inculcate the practical duties of mankind with more frequency and more earnestness than most other men. They do not, indeed, preach the morals of heathen philosophy : but they preach the cordial, principled, morality of the gospel, springing from the faith, ' without which it is impossible to please God.'

In my own view, this preaching is indispensable to mankind : and I cordially unite with the excellent Doddridge in saying, ' Happy would it be for the church of Christ, if these important doctrines of practical religion were more inculcated, and less of the zeal of its teachers spent in discussing vain questions, and intricate strifes about words, which have been productive of so much envy and contention, obloquy and suspicion.'

The next subject which offers itself to our consideration in a System of Theology, is the nature of that inability to obey the divine law, which is commonly acknowledged to be a part of the human character. It is hardly necessary to observe, that scarcely any

moral subject has been more a theme of contention than this. It is no part of my design to recount the clashing opinions which have been formed concerning it, or the controversies to which it has given birth. Metaphysical discussion has for ages lavished upon it all its subtilties. As I neither claim the reputation, nor enjoy the pleasure furnished by disquisitions of this nature, I shall not attempt to add any subtilties of my own to the mass which has already been accumulated. That ingenious men have, in several instances, thrown considerable light upon this difficult topic, I readily admit; and can easily believe that it may be illumined still farther. It will be a prime part of my own design not to environ it with darkness and perplexity. A plain tale is always attended by this advantage, that it may be easily understood. That which I shall utter will, I hope, be accompanied by the important additional advantage, that it will be true.

In the text we are informed, that 'the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.' The words translated, 'the carnal mind,' are, *το φρονημα της σαρκος*, 'the minding of the flesh.' *To mind*, is to regard with attention, respect, or desire. Here it plainly signifies that general course of desires which is exercised by mankind, in certain circumstances, towards certain objects; and which, in the preceding verse, is declared to be a state of spiritual death; or to terminate in future, everlasting death. It is obviously the prevailing characteristical course of desire; the whole 'minding of the flesh.' In the text it is declared to be 'enmity against God.' What is intended by 'the flesh,' is explained to us by Christ, John iii. 6. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' In other words, that which is born of man is possessed of the proper character of man. There are but two kinds of births mentioned in the Scriptures; and both these are expressed by our Saviour in this passage; viz. the *natural* birth, and *regeneration*. All that which experiences the natural birth

and that only, is declared by Christ to be 'flesh;' as that which experiences the spiritual birth, or regeneration, is declared to be 'spirit.' The moral character here intended is strongly indicated by our Saviour, when he informs us, that 'that which is born of the flesh (only) *cannot*,' and that 'that which is born of the Spirit,' *can* 'see the kingdom of God.' This moral character is still more particularly delineated by St. Paul, Gal. v. 19—23. 'Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.' It will hardly need proof, that the former of these classes of affections and actions, and such as these, are characteristic of man in his natural, unrenewed state; nor that the latter are exhibited by the Scriptures as constituting the true character of the children of God.

That the affections here mentioned 'are not subject to the law of God,' will not admit of a question; since they are the very things forbidden by that law. That they cannot be thus subject, while they continue to exist, is equally evident. Nor is it less certain, from the proofs given both by revelation and experience, that where the soul is not renewed by the Spirit of God, they continue to exist through life. Revelation teaches us, that, 'unless a man be born again of the Spirit' of God, he will continue to sustain the fleshly or natural character while he lives; and that all those, who 'receive' Christ, and become the children of God, 'are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' Experience shews also, with a regular testimony, that the native moral character of man con-

tinues, in the ordinary course of things, the same through life.

The *nature of this inability* to obey the law of God, is, in my own view, completely indicated by the word *indisposition*, or the word *disinclination*. To elucidate this position I observe,

1. *That the divine law originally requires nothing but affection.*

'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart ; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Here love to God and man is the only thing expressly required. But it hardly needs to be observed, that to be inclined. or disposed, to love God and our neighbour, is to possess that character, out of which all direct exercises of love spring of course. He therefore who possessed this character, would, whenever his mind was active at all, exercise the affection which is here required. He would *be* and *do* all which the law enjoins, when considered in this point of view : for his disposition and his exercises would be the very things which are enjoined. Indisposition, or disinclination, to obey, then, is the only difficulty in the way of obedience ; and, with respect to this subject, the only inability of man.

2. *When the divine law, in its various precepts, requires external actions, as well as affections ; if our disposition accord with the precept, the action will of course be performed.*

I speak here of such actions as are in our power ; for the law of God never requires any other.

For example : Children are required to honour their parents ; particularly to support them, when from their age or infirmity, they are unable to support themselves. It will not be doubted, that if children are disposed thus to support them, they will actually furnish the support. Men are forbidden to steal. The case, it may be confidently affirmed, was never known, and never will be, in which a man inclined upon the whole to obey this command, or entirely disinclined to steal, was guilty of theft. Mankind are forbidden to murder. No man abso

ately indisposed to murder ever perpetrated this crime. As in these, so in all other cases; as with respect to these precepts, so with respect to all others; active obedience follows inseparably the disposition to obey. Wherever the inclination accords with the precept, the tongue, the hands, and the feet conform of course, and entirely, to its decisions.

3. *If an angel were to descend from heaven, and reside upon the earth; he would, if he preserved his present disposition, obey the divine law as truly and as perfectly as he does now.*

If an angel were in this world, and were to possess exactly the same disposition which he possesses in the heavenly world, he would obviously feel and act in the same manner. In other words, he would be an angel still. Were we to suppose his faculties lessened to the measure of ours, so that his understanding, and other natural powers, should in no respect exceed those of men; still, if his angelic disposition remained, he would perfectly obey the divine law. He would 'love God with all the heart, and his neighbour as himself.' Should we suppose him to be lowered down still farther, to the level of a child, and to possess no natural powers superior to those usually found in children; he would, nevertheless, if he retained his angelic disposition, continue to be perfectly obedient. Should any person question this, let him remember, that the child Jesus is in the Scriptures pronounced to have been holy and perfectly obedient from the womb, and throughout all the successive periods of his life. When his faculties were in the earliest stages of their progress, he as perfectly obeyed, as he did after he began his public ministry. It cannot then be rationally doubted, that the angelic disposition, whatever might be the natural powers which it governed, would be, and would accomplish all that is meant by perfect obedience to the law of God. Of course, the real and only reason why we perform not this obedience is, that we do not possess such a disposition as that of angels. Our natural powers are plainly sufficient,

our inclination only is defective.

4. *This disinclination to obedience is still so obstinate and enduring, that it is never relinquished by man, except when under the renewing influence of the Spirit of God.*

I have already observed, that those who receive Christ, and become the children of God, are declared by St. John to be ‘born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;’ and by our Saviour, to be ‘born of the divine Spirit.’ The following passage from the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxvi. 24—28, will, I suppose, prove beyond a doubt, if not beyond a cavil, that this disposition is changed only by God himself: ‘For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.’ In this passage God declares that he will gather the Israelites out of all countries into their own land: that he will cleanse them from all their filthiness; that he will give them a new heart, and a new spirit; that he will take away their stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh: that he will put his Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in his statutes; that they shall be his people; and that he will be their God. When all this is accomplished, he says, ‘Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good; and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations.’ Here, the renovation of the human heart is described by sprinkling clean water; cleansing them from all their filthiness; giving them a new heart; putting in them a new spirit: taking away their stony heart; giving

them a heart of flesh ; putting the Spirit of God within them ; and causing them to walk in his statutes. All this, God says, and that in the plainest terms possible, he *himself* will do for them. As consequences of it all, God says, that they shall remember their own evil ways ; shall loath themselves in their own sight for their iniquities ; and shall keep his statutes, and do them. As a farther consequence, he says, that ' they shall be his people,' and that he will be ' their God.' The nature of this renovation cannot here be mistaken. It consists in having a new heart, differing from that which they originally possessed, as a heart of flesh differs from a heart of stone. It is also a heart cleansed from the filthiness of sin, and inclined to walk in the statutes and judgments of God. It is also a heart which will induce him to whom it is given to remember his own evil ways, to loath himself for his own iniquities, and to keep the judgments, or commands of God, and do them. That this is the moral character exhibited every where in the Scriptures, as required by the law of God, as unpossessed by man in his original or natural state, and as given him in what is called the new birth, cannot, if the words be allowed to have their own meaning, or any meaning consistent with their use elsewhere in the Scriptures, be questioned. But of this change in the Israelites at the period specified, *God*, in the most determinate language, declares *himself* to be the *efficient*. Of this change then, *he* certainly *will*, and *man* certainly *will not*, be the *efficient*. But if God will be the author of this change in the Israelites, he is unquestionably the author of it wherever it is experienced. Thus it is completely evident from the Scriptures, that the natural disinclination of man to obey the divine law is so obstinate, that it will not be overcome or removed by itself.

The proof of this truth from *experience* is, I acknowledge, less decisive, than that from revelation ; and is formed by an induction of too many particulars, as I observed in a former Discourse, to be ad-

duced on such an occasion as the present. The evidence furnished by reason and experience concerning this doctrine must be merely *auxiliary*. Concerning subjects of this kind, concerning the agency of voluntary beings, the nature of causation universally, and the manner in which causes operate, metaphysically considered, our knowledge must be confessed to be very imperfect. It deserves our attention, however, that the whole evidence furnished by experience goes to support this doctrine. All men of plainly acknowledged piety, so far as my information extends, have agreed in attributing their own renovation to the agency of the Divine Spirit. To this attribution they have been led also by a deep and solicitous attention to facts existing in their own minds. Although these facts have been greatly diversified in many respects, yet such men testify with a single voice, that they have been greatly alarmed on account of their guilt and danger; that, with an obvious or secret, but ultimately discovered, reliance on their own efforts, they have laboured with great earnestness to escape from both; that in the end they have clearly discerned all these efforts to be vain; that, with a full conviction of their own insufficiency, they have cast themselves upon the divine mercy; realizing that all their sufficiency for the great purpose in view must be of God. In this situation, they unitedly testify, they found, commencing in them sooner or later, a disposition, not perceptibly connected, as an effect, with any efforts of their own, prompting them to loath themselves for their iniquities, to confide in Christ as their Saviour, to love and fear God, and to 'keep his commandments, and do them.' This disposition also, they unitedly declare, irregularly but really increased as they advanced in life; while the propensity to disobedience lessened in the same manner. Now, let me ask, Is it credible, that all these men should radically err with respect to this subject? Is it credible, that they should all mistake the facts? Is it credible, that all should draw from them the same

and yet a false conclusion? This supposition involves another, which must, I think, be reluctantly admitted by every religious man; *viz.* That God in accomplishing the salvation of mankind orders things in such a manner, as that those who are renewed are, to say the least, in almost all instances deceived with respect to the author of their renovation; and that, while employed, not with integrity merely, but with deep solicitude, in exploring the state of their own minds and lives. According to this supposition, not only must their apprehensions concerning these important facts be false, and, so far as I can see, necessarily false, but all their emotions of gratitude, and all their ascriptions of praise to their Creator, for his agency in effectuating this happy change in their character, must be also false and unfounded. These ascriptions were begun in the early days of religion. Prophets and apostles set the example. All that was morally good in themselves, or in others, they attributed to the efficacious grace of God. In this attribution Christians have followed them throughout every succeeding age. Thus, according to this supposition, a succession of false, and therefore indefensible, ascriptions of praise has ascended to God from the great body of pious persons in all the ages of the church; which yet they could not honestly, and in consistence with the best views which they were able to form, have failed to render.

At the same time, no instances have occurred in which men have by direct efforts of their own, without the efficacious influence of the Divine Spirit, changed their moral character from sin to holiness. Not only have no such instances occurred which have been clear and unequivocal, and such as might be supposed to decide this point in favour of the supposition; but no collection of instances can be found which lean towards it, in a sufficient degree to render it probable. The whole stream of evidence, furnished both by the public and private history of experimental religion, is against the opinion which I have

endeavoured to disprove, and in favour of that which I have asserted.

Whatever may be the judgment formed by the spirit of controversy, and cold metaphysical investigation, concerning this part of the subject, the doctrine will be readily admitted by all men who are afflicted by a deep sense of their guilt, and struggle hard to obtain a release from their sinful character; and by all who, having thus suffered and thus struggled, have felt themselves in the end actually released from the dominant control of a sinful disposition.

This doctrine is elucidated by experience also in another manner. God, who requires our faith, repentance, and obedience to his law, has set before us numberless and most powerful motives to engage our compliance; motives which all sober men will acknowledge ought to persuade us, motives which are obviously of infinite import. Why do not men who believe the gospel to be the word of God, and who have these motives presented to them, clearly and forcibly, from sabbath to sabbath, believe, repent, and obey? No answer, it is presumed, can be given to this question, which will accord with the supposition against which I contend.

5. *There is yet no more difficulty in obeying God, than in doing any thing else, to which our inclination is opposed with equal strength and obstinacy.*

A child is equally unable to obey a parent, against whom his will is as much opposed, as to obey God. This inability of children to obey their parents does not, indeed, commonly last through life. But while it lasts, the child can no more obey his parent, than his Maker. In both cases his inability is, I apprehend, of exactly the same nature. Sometimes also it continues while he lives. In such cases it is, in all respects, the same; equally obstinate, equally enduring, equally preventing him from doing his duty. If in this case his filial duty be urged upon him in its religious nature, as required by the law of God; his opposition to perform his duty to God and his parent will be found exactly coincident; to be the same in.

divisible thing, and to be regarded as the same obduracy of heart.

These considerations will, to a considerable extent, explain many scriptural passages which relate to this subject. 'No man,' saith our Saviour, 'can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him.' The true meaning of this, he appears to me to explain in a parallel declaration to the Jews: 'Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.' That he who is willing to come to Christ, will actually come to him, we are taught by Christ himself in the last chapter of the Apocalypse: 'Whosoever will' (or is willing, *ὁ θέλων*), 'let him come, and take the water of life freely.' From these passages it is evident, that every one who is willing has the full permission of Christ to come to him, and partake of his blessings. Indisposition to come to Christ, is therefore the true and the only difficulty which lies in our way. Those who *cannot* come therefore are those, and those only, who *will* not.

The words *can*, and *cannot*, are used in the Scriptures just as they are used in the common intercourse of mankind, to express *willingness* or *unwillingness*. Thus we customarily say, that we cannot lend, or give, or assist, or pay a debt; when we mean nothing more, than that we are disinclined to these offices. Thus Samuel says to God, 'How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me.' That Samuel could have gone to Bethlehem, if he had pleased, needs no proof. As soon as his fear of Saul, which had made him unwilling, was removed, he went without any difficulty; 1 Sam. xvi. 2. 'How can this man give us his flesh?' said the Jews to our Saviour: John vi. 52; that is, How can he be willing to give us his flesh? 'This is a hard saying; who can hear it?' John vi. 60. The answer is, every one that is willing. 'Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?' Acts x. 47. 'Can ye drink of the cup that I shall drink of?' Mark x. 38. 'Can the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?' Mark ii. 19. 'Can a maid forget her ornaments

ments ; or a bride her attire ?' Jer. ii. 32. ' Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ?' Isa. xlix. 15. ' Can I hear any more the voice of singing-men, and singing-women ?' 2 Sam. ii. 35.

In all these and the like instances there is plainly nothing meant but inability of disposition, or a strong disinclination to the thing proposed. This is both the natural and universal language of men ; found equally in their conversation and their writings. Children speak this language almost as soon as they begin to speak at all ; and on every such occasion utter it more naturally than any other language. If the Scriptures would be intelligible to the great body of mankind, they must speak in the same manner. In this manner therefore God has directed them to be written.

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations it is evident, that the disobedience of mankind is their own fault.*

Wherever we understand the nature of our duty, and are hindered from performing it by disinclination only, conscience and common sense pronounce us to be guilty. Thus they have ever pronounced. The decision has been given in all ages and countries, in every conceivable form of language and conduct, with a universal acknowledgment of its soundness, in the most definite terms, and with the highest solemnity.

2. *The degree of our inability to obey the divine law does in no case lessen our guilt.*

Certainly, he who is more disinclined to obedience, is not less guilty than he who is less disinclined. Disinclination to obey is our inability, and our sin. The greater our disinclination is, the greater plainly, not the less, is our sin.

3. *These observations teach us the propriety of urging sinners to immediate repentance.*

Their present state is a state of extreme guilt and danger. Of this it is the duty of every minister to produce, as far as may be, a strong conviction in

their minds. Equally is it his duty to shew them, what is equally true, that they are under the highest obligations to repent immediately. They are now, they always have been, sinners. Every sin of which they have been guilty demanded their immediate repentance. The only reason which they can allege for delaying their repentance, is the very reason why they have hitherto refused to obey the divine law; viz. their disinclination. But this is their sin: and sin is itself that which demands their repentance, instead of being a justification of their delay.

But it will be objected, that the sinner cannot, or, in the very language of this discourse, will not, repent of himself. Why then should he be urged to immediate repentance? I will give the answer. So long as the sinner feels himself in any degree excused in delaying this duty, there is every reason to fear that he will be more and more at ease, and more and more disposed to delay. His views will be false and dangerous, and his conduct will eagerly accord with his views. But a full conviction of his duty will create in him a sense of danger, a conviction of his guilt, and a trembling anxiety concerning his future being. In this situation he will naturally, and almost necessarily, commence those efforts of solemn reflection, that deep attention to the word of God, and those attempts to supplicate for mercy, that conviction of his helplessness, and that strong sense of the absolute necessity of being sanctified by the Spirit of grace, which, in the usual providence of God, precede regeneration.

SERMON CXXXIV.

FAITH AND REPENTANCE NECESSARY TO RESTORE
US TO OBEDIENCE.

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you; but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying, both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.—ACTS XX. 20, 21.

IN the preceding Discourse I examined the inability of mankind to obey the divine law. It is evident that, if we are ever to be restored to divine favour, we must first be restored to a spirit of obedience. The manner in which we may obtain this restoration, becomes therefore the next subject of our inquiry.

St. Paul in the context, declares to the elders of the church of Ephesus, and appeals to them for the truth of the declaration, that he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God concerning their salvation. This, he farther asserts, he did by teaching them both publicly, and from house to house, at all seasons, and amid many temptations and sorrows. While he served the Lord with all humility of mind, and many tears, he confidently avers, that 'he kept back nothing, which was profitable unto them;' or, in other words, taught them every thing, which was profitable. Of course he taught every thing which was profitable to mankind at large, as creatures of God, and candidates for immortality. All this, however, he sums up in the second verse of the text in these two phrases: 'Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We are not, indeed, to suppose that, in the literal sense, St. Paul taught nothing but faith and repentance to the Ephesian Christians. There can be no reasonable doubt that he taught the Ephesians generally, what he taught the Christian world at large,

and particularly the things contained in the Epistle which he wrote to the church at Ephesus. The meaning of his declaration in the text is, I apprehend, merely that he had taught the doctrines concerning faith and repentance, as *pre-eminently* the means of salvation. That this view of the subject is just, is sufficiently evident from the context. Here the apostle teaches the elders, to whom his speech was addressed, many things besides these doctrines: and declares that he had heretofore instructed them in the great duty of communicating good to others, as the amount of all that which they owed to their fellow-men. The religion of the gospel is the religion of *sinner*s: as the religion of the law is that of *virtuous* beings. The gospel is a scheme of restoration to beings who have rebelled against their Maker, and are condemned by the law which they have broken, to suffer the punishment due to their sins; but who yet, in consistency with the character and government of God, may be forgiven. It is a scheme by which these beings may be restored to their allegiance, to a virtuous character, and to the divine favour. If such beings are ever to be restored to the favour of God, if they are ever to obtain the *privileges* of good subjects of the divine government, it is evident that they must, in some manner or other, be restored to the *character* of good subjects. In other words, if they are ever to possess the *rewards* of obedience, they must be previously possessed of the *spirit* of obedience. Whatever accomplishes for them, or becomes the means of accomplishing, this mighty change in their circumstances, must to them be of inestimable importance. As the gospel contains the religion of sinners in the situation above-mentioned, this importance must belong to the gospel. In a particular manner must it be attributable to such doctrines or duties in the gospel, as are peculiarly necessary, and absolutely indispensable. From the place which faith and repentance held in the preaching of St. Paul, it is plain, that *they* are the important things in question; the immediate and indispensable means of our

restoration to obedience, and to the consequent enjoyment of the divine favour.

This truth is abundantly exhibited in many forms throughout the different parts of the New Testament. In Mark i. 14, 15, is contained the following declaration : ‘ Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled ; and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the gospel ;’ or, as in the Greek, ‘ believe in the gospel.’ In this passage we have evidently the substance of our Saviour’s preaching ; and this is *repentance, and faith in the good tidings of the divine kingdom*, or the glorious dispensation of mercy to sinners through the Redeemer.

In Acts ii. 37, 38, we are informed, that the Jews, being ‘ pricked in their hearts’ by the preaching of St. Peter, particularly by his pungent exhibition of their guilt in crucifying Christ, inquired of him and John, with extreme solicitude, what they should do to obtain forgiveness and salvation. St. Peter answered them, ‘ Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.’ To be baptized in the name of Christ, is, as every one who reads the gospel knows, a public and most solemn profession of faith in him, as the Redeemer of mankind. St. Peter therefore in this answer, makes in substance the same declaration with that of St. Paul in the text.

When the jailor inquired of Paul and Silas, Acts xvi. 30, 31, ‘ What he should do to be saved ?’ they answered, ‘ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, with thine house.’—‘ Without faith,’ St. Paul declares, Heb. xi. 6, ‘ it is impossible to please God.’—‘ He that believeth on the Son, saith John the Baptist, John iii. 36, ‘ hath everlasting life. He that believeth not the Son shall not see life : but the wrath of God abideth on him.’—‘ He that believeth on him,’ saith Christ to Nicodemus, John iii. 18, ‘ is not condemned ; but he that believeth not is condemned already.’

Christ, in Matt. ix. 13, declares the end of his coming to be to 'call, not the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.' When therefore sinners repent, the end of Christ's coming is fulfilled. In Acts v. 31 he is said by St. Peter to be 'exalted as a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins.' Remission of sins is, of course, consequent upon repentance. In Acts xi. 18, it is said, 'Then hath God granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life.' In 2 Cor. vii. 10, St. Paul declares, that 'godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation. — 'Except ye repent,' says Christ to his disciples, Luke xiii. 3, 'ye shall all likewise perish : ' and again, 'There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance,' Luke xv. 7.

In this passage, and indeed in many others, remission, life, and salvation are indubitably and inseparably connected with faith and repentance. Sometimes they are connected with both conjointly, and sometimes with one. The account given of the subject is, however, in all instances the same : because he who possesses one of these Christian graces, is of course, and always, possessed of the other. On the contrary, without these, life, remission, and salvation are plainly declared to be unattainable. It is evident, therefore, that faith and repentance are the attributes supremely required by the gospel ; the immediate fulfilment of its two great precepts ; in the possession of which mankind are assured of eternal life, and without which they are exposed to eternal death. To produce and perpetuate them in the soul, is visibly the great object, so far as man is concerned, which Christ came into the world to accomplish. In other words, they are that essential obedience to the gospel, to which salvation is promised and given, as a reward ; 'not of debt, but of the free and sovereign grace of God.

Having, if I mistake not, placed this truth beyond every reasonable doubt, and thus shewn the way in which mankind, although sinners, condemned by

the divine law, and incapable of justification by their own works, may yet be gratuitously justified, return to their obedience, and be reinstated in the divine favour; I shall now endeavour to explain the nature of this subject; and to exhibit the manner in which the doctrine is true.

The foundation of all religion is the existence, character, law, and government of God. This glorious and perfect Being, as the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, of the universe, is, of the most absolute right, the Ruler of the work which he has made, and the Lawgiver of all his moral creatures. The law which he has prescribed to them demands all their duty, and regulates all their moral conduct. Man, who is of the number of these moral creatures, is placed under this law; and justly required by his Maker to 'love him with all the heart, and to love his neighbour as himself.' In the progress of these Discourses, it has, unless I am deceived, been clearly shewn, that man has utterly failed of performing this duty; that he is therefore condemned by the law to the sufferance of its penalty: that the law knows no condition of pardon, escape, or return; that man cannot expiate his sins; and that, if left to himself, he must therefore perish.

In this situation as has been heretofore explained, Christ interposed on the behalf of our ruined race; and made an atonement for our sins, with which the Father is well pleased. This atonement, the Scriptures have assured us God has accepted; and, having thus provided a method in which he can be just, and yet justify those who were sinners, is ready to extend the blessing of pardon and salvation to this apostate world.

Accordingly, Christ has announced himself to sinful men as their Saviour; and proffered to them deliverance, both from their sin, and their condemnation. The conditions on which this proffer has been made, are repentance towards God, and faith towards himself, as the Lord and Saviour of mankind. In order to understand, so far as we are

able, the propriety and necessity of these conditions of our restoration, it will be useful to attend to the following considerations:—

1. *Sincere, exalted, and enduring happiness cannot be enjoyed by any beings, except those who are virtuous.*

This great and fundamental truth in that philosophy which explains the nature and interests of moral beings, has, it is believed, been completely evinced in this series of Discourses. It has been shewn, that a sinful mind is at war with itself, its fellow-creatures, and its God; that it must, of course, be subject to reproaches of conscience, to perpetual disquiet, to consciousness of the divine anger and to the loathing and contempt of all good beings. It has been shewn, that such a mind must be a prey to tumultuous passions, vehement desires, which are not and cannot be gratified, and endless disappointments in the pursuit of a selfish interest, which can never be promoted, without sacrificing the glory of the Creator, and the happiness of his creatures.

It has been proved, that its chosen enjoyments are in their nature vain, transient, delusive, little, base, and contemptible; inconsistent with real excellence, dignity, and self-approbation; and incompatible with the well-being of others, whose interests are singly of equal importance, and united are immeasurably deserving of higher regard.

From these considerations it is unanswerably evident, that a sinful mind cannot be happy; for with such affections, and their consequences, happiness is plainly inconsistent. The mind, which is not at ease within, cannot derive happiness from without. ‘A wounded spirit who can bear?’ especially when wounded by the arrows of an angry conscience. If then God is pleased to communicate happiness to him who is a sinner, it is indispensably necessary that he should first remove the sinful disposition, whence all these evils immutably flow.

2. *The only possible method of removing sin from a moral being, is to make him the subject of evangelical repentance*

So long as the soul loves sin, it must be the subject of that vile and guilty character, which we denominate moral turpitude, depravity, and corruption; together with all its consequences. For the love of sin is pre-eminently this character. While this love continues, he in whom it exists will perpetrate, of course, all those which we customarily call sins, or sinful actions. He will also love sin continually, more and more; and perpetrate it with more and more eagerness, and hostility to God. From all the knowledge which we possess of moral character, it seems plainly to be its nature, whether virtuous or vicious, to become more and more fixed in its habits, and intense in its desires. So long therefore as the love of sin prevails in the mind, the situation of the sinner must be hopeless, with regard to his assumption of a spirit of obedience, and his attainment of consequent happiness.

The repentance of the gospel is formed of *the hatred of sin, sorrow for it, a disposition to confess it to God, and resolutions to renounce it*. From this definition it is manifest, that evangelical repentance is the direct removal of sin from the soul of the sinner. By the *hatred* of sin, which it includes as a first principle, the soul is withdrawn from the practice of it. By the *sorrow*, it is warned of the danger and evil of returning to it again. By the *confession* of it to God, the soul is brought into near, full, and most endearing views of the glorious goodness of its heavenly Father, in forgiving its iniquities; and most happily prepared to watch, and strive, and pray that it may offend him no more. By its *resolutions to forsake it*, the penitent is fortified against future indulgences, and prepared to assume a life of filial obedience. In all these things we cannot, I think, avoid perceiving, that evangelical repentance is the direct and the only means of removing sin originally from the heart, and consequentially from the life, of a moral being; and that thus it is absolutely necessary to prepare men for obedience to the law of God, and a general conformity to his character and plea-

sure. To such beings as we are, it is therefore indispensable, if we are ever to become the subject of real and enduring happiness.

3. *For this great end it is also necessary, that we should be united to God.*

The relations between the Creator and his intelligent creatures are not only near and important, but indispensable also to the happiness of such creatures. Out of them arises a great part of all the thoughts, affections, duties, and enjoyments of which they are capable. These are also the foundation on which all other valuable thoughts, affections, duties, and enjoyments rest; and are necessary to their existence, as well as their worth. In the relation of children only do we, or can we, apprehend the endearing and glorious character of Jehovah, as the common, most affectionate, and most venerable Parent of the virtuous universe; feel towards him the various filial affections; and perform the various filial duties which are included under the general name of piety. In the same relation only can we enjoy the peculiar and pre-eminent happiness of loving and glorifying him as 'our Father who is in heaven.' In this relation only do we also receive and feel the unnumbered proofs of his parental tenderness, and unlimited mercy.

As children of God, and by means of the filial views and affections which in this character we entertain, we begin first to understand and to feel that we are brethren. This character is the true inlet to all the fraternal regards of virtuous beings, and to the endless train of spiritual sympathies and social endearments which spring up in sanctified minds, and which with new strength, purity, and delight, will for ever grow and flourish in the heavens above.

But without union to God, no relation, whether natural or moral, can be of any use to ourselves. Without this union, the blessings flowing from these relations cannot begin. When minds do not coincide with him in their views, and are not united to him in their affections and character, *he cannot with*

propriety give, nor *they* possibly enjoy these blessings. The nearest relation to God, if unperceived, unfelt, and unacknowledged, is in the apprehension of the soul which sustains it, nothing. It is the cordial, grateful sense of such a relation, the welcome, delightful recognition of it, which makes it the foundation of all this good. With such a sense, with such a recognition, the soul draws nigh to God with affections harmonizing with his pleasure, and with views coinciding with all his revealed designs. Separated from God, the soul can entertain no such views, and can feel no such affections towards him. Nor can it perform any duties, nor realize any rational or lasting enjoyment. In such a state of separation, it is a plant on which the beams of the Sun of Righteousness cease to shine; and is of course chilled, shrunk, and destroyed.

4. *Faith in Jesus Christ is the only possible union between man and his Maker.*

God in the covenant of redemption has promised to receive, justify, and save for ever, all who are Christ's at his appearing: that is, all who become his by a voluntary surrender of themselves to him. But the only method in which man ever does or can surrender himself voluntarily to Christ, is the exercise of faith, or confidence, in him as the Saviour of the world. This is the only method of becoming his, which is proposed to us by Christ himself. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' is the sole language of the Scriptures concerning this subject. On this, however, I need not insist; because I have heretofore, if I mistake not, satisfactorily proved the doctrine at large. Still it may be useful to consider the nature of the subject with some degree of attention and particularity, as being capable, at least in my view, of illustrating the doctrine in an impressive and edifying manner.

Christ offers to save sinners who are condemned and perishing, and who are therefore utterly unable to save themselves. In this offer he declares himself able, willing, and faithful, to 'save to the ut-

termost, all that will come unto God by him' Now it is impossible for us to come to him, or to God by him, unless we confide in this as his true character, and in the declarations by which he makes this character known to us. It is impossible for us to receive his instructions, as the means of knowledge and guidance to us in the path of duty and salvation; his precepts, as the rules of our obedience; or his ordinances, as the directory of our worship; unless we confide in the character of him who has taught them, as a wise and faithful teacher. It is indispensable, that we confide in him as a teacher, who knows, and who has told us, that which is true, right, and safe for us, in these immensely important concerns. It is indispensable, that we believe in him, and trust in him, as vested with all the authority necessary to this character of a divine instructor. and regard him, as certainly and fully disclosing the will of God concerning our duty and salvation. Unless we can confide in these things, we can never receive his instructions as rules either of our faith, or of our practice. Without these things they would all dwindle at once into mere philosophy, mere advice, mere opinions, to obey which no person would or could feel the least obligation.

His atonement, in the same manner, would be nothing to us, unless we could cordially believe it to be efficacious, sufficient, and acceptable in the sight of God. It is only because we regard it as the atonement of so glorious, sufficient, and acceptable a person, that it possesses in any sense the character of an atonement. Accordingly, the Socinians, who consider Christ as a mere man, generally do, and, if they would be consistent with themselves, must believe that he made no atonement, but was merely a martyr, or witness to the truth.

Christ also requires us to commit our souls to his care and keeping; or, in other words, to become his by voluntarily surrendering ourselves into his hands, and looking for safety and happiness to his protection, mercy, and truth. This we cannot do in any

other manner, nor by any other means, beside the exercise of confidence in him. Who would commit his everlasting well-being to a person in whose kindness and truth, in whose power and wisdom, he did not confide? No man ever did or could commit himself, or his interests, even in this world, to any person whatever, unless in the exercise of confidence. How much more difficult, how contrary to the first principles of our nature, how absolutely impossible, must it then be to commit our eternal interests, ourselves, our all, to a being in whom we do not entirely confide?

In the exercise of evangelical faith, or confidence, in the character of Christ, we become united to him, according to the declarations of the Scriptures, and according to all the views which reason can form of this subject, in a very near, most desirable, and most delightful union. He himself says to his disciples, John xv. 4, 5, 'I am the Vine; ye are the branches. Abide in me; and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me.' St. Paul says, 'We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;' and again; 'Now ye are the body of Christ, and members one of another;' 1 Cor. xii. 27 and again, Col. i. 18, 'He is the head of the body, the church.' The whole church also, both in heaven and on earth, is exhibited as gathered under one head, that is, Christ; Eph. i. 10. But our Saviour himself has given us the most sublime and glorious exhibition of this subject, which was ever made to mankind, in the following passage of his intercessory prayer: John xvii. 20—23, 'Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one: as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe, that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me: that they may be made perfect in one; and

that the world may know that thou hast sent me; and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.' This transcendent, this divine union, here exhibited to us as being of all possible importance, is, and can be, accomplished for mankind only by evangelical faith, or confidence, in Christ.

5. *To the happiness of the soul it is also indispensable, that it should always obey its Creator; and of this obedience, evangelical faith is the only source.*

That obedience to God is necessary to the happiness of rational creatures, and that their uniform obedience is necessary to their uniform happiness, has been already proved under the first head of this Discourse. If sin is fatal to happiness, and incompatible with its existence; it follows, of course, that obedience is indispensable to happiness. Obedience and disobedience are the only two possible moral states of an intelligent being. If then disobedience creates misery, obedience of course creates happiness.

It may, however, be useful, to consider this subject somewhat farther. It was shewn in a former Discourse that God, and God only, knows what conduct will produce or ensure happiness; and that he only is alway, invariably, and infinitely disposed to have that conduct exist. He only possesses the authority also, and the power to require it of his creatures. Hence, he only can be the uniform and efficient Director of his creatures to their real good. If then creatures are to be happy at all, it is indispensably necessary that they obey his directions, and conform to his pleasure, as the only possible rule of right, the only possible way to real and universal good. All who wander from this path are soon lost in a wilderness of error, distress, and despair; and will never find their proper home.

But we cannot obey God, except from confidence in his character, as a perfectly wise, just, and good Teacher and Lawgiver, who has instructed us in our true interest; a Lawgiver, who has prescribed wise, just, and benevolent precepts to regulate our duty. Unless we consider his precepts 'concerning all

things to be right,' we can never voluntarily obey them. Confidence therefore in the character of God, and in his instructions and precepts, as flowing from that character, and partaking of his wisdom and rectitude, is the true and only possible source of that spontaneous obedience which is acceptable to him, virtuous in us, and indispensable to all our real good.

Thus, if I am not deceived, 'repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,' are the substance of the means by which sinners are delivered from sin, reinstated in the character of children, restored to the favour of God, entitled to eternal life, and prepared for everlasting obedience and enjoyment in the heavens above.

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations it is evident, that the objections made by infidels against evangelical repentance, as mean-spirited and contemptible, are groundless.*

Mr. Hume observes, that 'self-mortification, self-denial, and humility, stupify the understanding, sour the temper, and harden the heart.' Whatever produces these consequences by its proper efficacy is undoubtedly, in its nature, vicious or sinful, since the consequences themselves are plainly of a sinful nature. Self-denial, self-mortification, and humility are all essential ingredients of genuine repentance; and without them such repentance cannot exist. A just, clear, and humble sense of our guilt and unworthiness is the very basis on which every thing else contained in repentance is founded. With such a sense of our character, it is impossible that we should not endeavour to mortify those inclinations, and deny ourselves that gratification of them, which together have constituted our guilt, our odiousness, our debasement, and our danger. The humble thoughts which we thus experience, and the humble emotions by which they are accompanied, are the only just thoughts concerning our character, and the only proper emotions with respect to ourselves, so far as this character exists. Every opinion, every

feeling not accordant with these, is false and groundless ; the silly dream of a vain and silly mind. A little self-knowledge, a very limited degree of candour, united with a very moderate self-examination, would convince any mind of the visionary nature of such opinions, and the absolute impropriety of such feelings.

Proud and vain men have, however, always despised humility, and regarded it as deserving their contempt. Still, it is unquestionably the first honour which belongs to our nature, and the beginning of every thing else which is really honourable in man. All sin is shame : and, let it be remembered, there is nothing shameful except sin. The very pride, the very vanity, from which these decisions of infidels spring, is itself gross sin, and not less shameful than the other exercises of the same spirit. All men see and declare this, under the guidance of mere common sense ; and, although each cherishes it in himself every one hates, despises, and condemns it in his fellow-men. How little would Christ have merited, how plainly impossible would it have been for him to have gained, that exalted estimation which he now holds in the minds of angels and of men, had he been a proud and vain, and not a meek and lowly, Redeemer ! How infinitely distant is the character of this glorious Person from that of Alexander, or that of Cæsar ! The character of these men is fitly imaged by the smoke ascending from the bottomless pit ; while the aspect of the Saviour is that of the sun, shining in his strength.

But, aside from these considerations, repentance, however reprobated by haughty-minded men, is in itself real good, and essential to all other real good. It is the only possible removal of sin, the worst of all evils, and the source of every other evil. It is the only possible security against the resumption of that guilty, debased, and shameful character. It is the commencement of virtue in the soul, and indispensable to its very existence. It is real dignity in itself, and the beginning of all real

dignity. It is plainly the only solid basis of peace of conscience, and well founded self-approbation. By Hume it was seen, so far as he saw it at all, only at a distance; and through the false optics of philosophical pride. It was therefore erroneously seen, understood, and represented. Neither this writer, nor his companions in infidelity, appear to have discerned the distinction between the repentance of a mercenary slave, regretting his faults merely from the expectation of punishment, and the ingenuous contrition of a child sorrowing for his disobedience, loathing his guilt, and returning with a new and better heart to his filial character and duty.

2. *We see how groundless the objection of Godwin is to the Scriptures; viz. That they lay an improper and unwarrantable stress on faith.*

Faith, it is well known, is the great condition of acceptance with God proposed in the gospel; as unbelief is of final rejection. To this scheme Godwin objects, as unreasonable and absurd. But if the account here given of this attribute be just, the absurdity will be found to lie, not in the scriptural scheme, but in the objection. It has, if I mistake not, been shewn in this Discourse, that without union to God, and cordial obedience to his will, we cannot enjoy rational and enduring good; and that without evangelical faith, no such union, and no such obedience, can exist. The faith of the gospel is therefore of all possible importance to man, of as much importance as his whole well-being, involving every thing which is desirable or useful. Had the Scriptures therefore laid less stress upon this subject, it would have been an unanswerable objection to the religious system which they contain.

The contrary character of *distrust*, which is plainly the native character of man, is obviously a complete separation of any intelligent being from his Maker. It is impossible that such beings should exercise any of those affections with which alone they can glorify their Creator, or cordially obey him, so long as they distrust his moral character. Equally impossible is

it, that they should possess the enjoyment which alone can fill the wishes, or is suited to the nature of an immortal mind. The distrust of a friend makes us unhappy *here*. The distrust of God would make us miserable *for ever*!

The faith of the gospel deserves, then, all the importance which is given to it by the Scriptures. The place which it ought to hold in the estimation of all men is pre-eminent. By every preacher it ought to be insisted on, by every man it ought to be pursued, as of all possible consequence to obedience and salvation. The preacher who does not thus inculcate it is unfaithful; the man who does not acquire it is undone.

SERMON CXXXV.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

PROOFS THAT THERE ARE SUCH MEANS.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, ye have not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.—1 Cor. iv. 15.

THE preceding Sermon finished the observations which I originally proposed to make concerning the Law of God; the inability of man to obey it; and the means of his restoration to obedience, and to the consequent favour of God.

The next subject, in the order of these Discourses, is, The means, in the application of which, men usually obtain faith and repentance, and thus become entitled to eternal life.

Before I begin the discussion of this subject, I request my audience to call to mind the import of the last Discourse, together with others which have been delivered concerning the same subjects. I wish it to be remembered, that, in my view, evangelical faith and repentance are indispensable to the existence of

any moral good in the soul of man, and are in all instances the beginning of that good. Particularly, they are the commencement of obedience to the law of God; the foundation of real and enduring happiness to such as are, or have been, sinners; and are, obviously, the immediate duty of all men. He therefore who does not teach these doctrines, omits, in my apprehension, the soul and substance of the gospel.

With these things premised, I observe, that in this passage of Scripture, St. Paul declares himself to have 'begotten' the Corinthian Christians 'in Christ,' and thus to have been a *cause* of their being regenerated, or born again. That the new birth is the birth here referred to, will not be disputed. Nor can it be questioned, that St. Paul was, in some manner and degree or other, concerned in effectuating it, without a peremptory denial of his veracity and inspiration. It is farther declared by him, that 'he had begotten them through the gospel.' It is therefore certain, that the gospel also was, in some or other manner, or degree, concerned in effectuating the new birth of the Corinthian Christians.

If the apostle, as a minister of the gospel, was concerned in effectuating the new birth of the Corinthian Christians, it will follow, by unobjectionable analogy, that *other ministers* are also, in the *like* manner or degree, concerned in effectuating the regeneration of such as become Christians under their ministry. Farther: If the gospel was thus concerned in the regeneration of the Corinthian Christians, then it is also equally concerned in that of Christians in general.

But if ministers of the gospel be, in any manner or degree, concerned in *producing* this change in the moral character of men, they are just so far *means* of producing it. Of consequence also they are, according to that course of divine providence, in which they are thus instrumental, *necessary* to this change, just so far as they are means of producing it.

It is not here intended, that God could not, if he pleased, produce this change in the human character

without these or any other means. Nor is it intended, that in some cases he does not actually thus produce it. It is unquestionably in the power of God to effectuate this change with infinite ease, in any manner which he shall think proper. Nor have we any proof that he has not in many instances renewed men without connecting the renovation with any means whatever. But it is here intended, that this is not the usual course of his spiritual providence; and that, in that course, means are really employed to bring men into the heavenly kingdom. It is farther intended, that these means are *so far necessary*, as that, *without them*, this important end would not, in the *ordinary course of providence*, be accomplished.

If God has thought proper to conduct his spiritual providence in such a manner as to constitute it a regular and orderly course of events; then *our own* views of it are to be formed so as to accord with this constitution, and to admit it as a part of the evangelical system. Our conduct also is to be referred and conformed to this constitution. With it we are to expect other things to accord. Particularly, *we are* to expect salvation for ourselves and others according to this plan, and not according to a different one. Just views of this subject will therefore be easily seen to claim no small importance in the estimation of those who wish to be saved.

In the particular investigation of this subject, I propose,

- I. *To shew that there are means of grace.*
- II. *To shew what they are.*
- III. *To explain their influence.*
- IV. *To answer the principal objections to this scheme of doctrine.*

I. *I shall attempt to shew that there are means of grace.*

This position I shall endeavour to establish in the following manner:—

1. *I allege, as evidence of its truth, the direct declarations of Scripture.*

The text is an explicit and forcible declaration of this nature. In this passage the apostle asserts in the most unequivocal manner, that *he* was a cause, and *the gospel* another, of regeneration to the Corinthian Christians: not a cause in *the efficient* sense, but *the instrumental*. In other words, he declares that himself and the gospel were *means* of their regeneration. It cannot be said here, that the apostle and the gospel were to these Christians means of *edification*; or of *their advancement in holiness*, after they were regenerated. This subject is not even hinted at in the passage. The *birth* is not any part of the growth, subsequent to itself. *To beget*, is not to nourish, or cause to grow. It is to contribute to the original existence of the thing begotten, and not to its subsequent improvement. The apostle and the gospel then, contributed to the regeneration of these Christians, and were means of bringing it to pass.

In Phil. 10, St. Paul declares the same truth in the same language, 'I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.'

In the Epistle of St. James, chap. i. 18, that apostle says, 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we (the first-converted Jews) should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.'

On this passage I shall make two remarks. The first is, that St. James uses the same language to denote the regeneration of the Jewish Christians, which St. Paul uses to denote that of the Corinthian Christians. If then the terms in St. James denote regeneration, which will not be denied, they denote the same thing in the text. But the passage in St. James is unquestionable proof that God regenerated the persons spoken of in this passage. Equally undeniable proof is furnished by the text, that St. Paul was either the agent, or the means, of regeneration to the Christians in Corinth. But God is the only agent, or efficient cause, of regeneration. If we deny the fact, that St. Paul was the means of regeneration to these persons, as asserted in the text,

we must, according to the same principles, deny the fact, that God was the efficient cause of regeneration, as asserted by St. James. The same rules of construction will oblige us to admit both these propositions, or to reject them both. The language is the same; and that it ought to be interpreted by the same rules of construction cannot be doubted.

The second remark is this: *St. James declares, that God has regenerated him, and his fellow-Christians, by the word of truth; that is, by the gospel.* The gospel was therefore, certainly, the means of accomplishing this event.

St. Peter, in his first Epistle, chap. i. 10; speaking of himself and those to whom he wrote, says, 'Being born again,' or regenerated, 'not of corruptible seed, but by the word of God, who liveth and abideth for ever.' In this passage St. Peter declares, that Christians are born, or regenerated (*δια λόγου*), by means of the word of God. Of course, he declares that they were not regenerated without the instrumentality of the word of God. What is true with respect to this subject, of the Christians to whom St. Peter wrote, will not be denied to be true of Christians universally.

In 1 Tim. iv. 16, St. Paul says, 'Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them for in so doing thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.' That Timothy would, in fact, both save himself and those who heard him, cannot be denied, unless we charge St. Paul with falsehood. But if Timothy was not in this case an instrument, or a means of salvation to them, the declaration cannot be true. For God is the only efficient cause of salvation to any man.

In Rom. iii. 1, 2, St. Paul says, 'What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.' In this passage St. Paul declares that the Jews had much advantage over the Gentiles; and that this advantage lay 'chiefly' in the fact, 'that unto them

were committed the oracles of God.' If the possession of the oracles of God was of great advantage to the Jews, we naturally ask, in what respect was it an advantage? Plainly in this: that the oracles of God contributed, or were capable of contributing, to their salvation, and consequently to their regeneration. Of what possible advantage could the oracles of God be to unconverted men, and of such only is the apostle here speaking, unless they contributed in some manner and degree or other to their conversion? This question, it is believed, admits of no answer.

In Rom. x. 14, the same apostle says, 'How then shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?' Every person at all acquainted with language, knows that these questions have exactly the same import with that of strong negative declarations; and that the apostle has here, in the most forcible manner asserted, that men cannot call on him in whom they have not believed; nor believe in him, of whom they have not heard; nor hear without a preacher. In other words, he declares the preaching of the gospel to be, in the ordinary course of providence, indispensably necessary to the faith of mankind in Christ, just as that faith is indispensable to the invocation of his name in prayer. That the apostle understood these questions in this manner, is unanswerably evident from his own conclusion, subjoined in the seventeenth verse: 'So then, faith cometh by hearing; and hearing by the word of God.'

These passages, it is believed, are sufficient, if any passages can be sufficient, to decide the question. It would be easy to multiply quotations of the same import to a great extent; for this is the common language of the Scriptures. But as a long course of quoting and commenting necessarily becomes tedious, I shall conclude this part of the discussion, by repeating, in a very summary manner, a

few other passages, and phrases, which directly indicate, in other forms, the same truth.

The Scriptures are called the 'word of salvation;' the 'word of life;' the 'word of faith;' the 'word of wisdom;' the 'word of knowledge;' the 'word of reconciliation;' and the 'sword of the Spirit.' None of these appellations, it is apprehended, could be given to them with propriety, unless they were in truth means of salvation to men. They are called 'the word of God, which inwrought effectually' in the Thessalonians, 'when they first received it,' 1 Thess. ii. 13. They are said by God himself, speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, to be 'as a fire, and as a hammer, that breaketh the rock in pieces,' Jer. xxiii. 29. They are asserted by St. Paul to be quick (or living) and powerful; sharper than any two-edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit; and to be a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart,' Heb. iv. 12. Our Saviour says to the Jews, 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth;' and, to explain his meaning, subjoins, 'The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.'

It is said, that when 'the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them who believe,' 1 Cor. i. 21.

St. Paul declares the gospel to be 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,' Rom. i. 10.

From these passages it is evident, that the Scriptures, in their customary language, declare themselves, particularly as preached to mankind, to be means of salvation.

2. *I argue the same doctrine from the commission given by Christ to his apostles.*

This commission is recorded, Matt. xxviii. 19, in these words; 'Go ye, disciple (that is, make disciples of) all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'

The word, μαθητευσατε, rendered 'teach' in the common translation, is literally rendered *disciple*.

Διδασκω is the proper term to denote *teaching*. *Μαθητευω* denotes *to make a person a disciple*, in the same sense, in which the apostles, and their contemporary Christians, were disciples of Christ. A disciple, as the term is used in the New Testament, is a person who receives, approves, and voluntarily conforms to the doctrines and precepts of his instructor. Such were the disciples of the Pharisees such were those of John the Baptist; and such were those of Christ. Christ, it will be admitted, commissioned the apostles to make real disciples of those to whom they preached, and not disciples in pretence and profession merely. But every real disciple is regenerated.

The nations to whom the apostles were sent, were Jews and heathen; and of course were unbelievers and sinners. Christ therefore commissioned the apostles to make disciples of unbelievers and sinners. It will not be denied, that he commissioned them to do that which, in the ordinary progress of things, could be done; and which they, so far as they faithfully obeyed his commands, did actually accomplish. The apostles therefore did really in the proper sense make disciples of these sinners.

Accordingly, St. Paul says, that he desired to 'have fruit among the Romans, as he had had among the other Gentiles,' Rom. i. 13. He speaks of himself and Apollos, as 'ministers by whom,' that is, by means of whom, 'the Corinthians believed,' 1 Cor. iii. 5. He says that he and his companions 'received grace and apostleship, for the obedience of faith among all nations,' Rom. i. 5. St. Peter, Acts xv. 7, says, that 'God had chosen, that the Gentiles by his mouth should hear the gospel, and believe.' Every where also, in the Book of Acts, both Jews and Gentiles are exhibited as having believed and turned to God by means of the preaching of the apostles and their coadjutors.

Thus the commission was fulfilled exactly, according to its tenor; and the gospel actually became the means of faith and salvation to those to whom it was preached.

But this commission was given to all succeeding ministers, as well as to the apostles ; and is the very authority under which they now preach, and perform all the other duties of the ministerial office. All that was here said to the apostles, is in the very same sense said to *them*. It is equally their business and duty to make disciples of mankind, wherever providence presents them an opportunity ; and to baptize them when made. Of course, *they* as really make disciples of unbelievers and sinners, and are as really means of faith and salvation to mankind.

The very fact of giving this commission is in itself decisive proof of this truth. It was undoubtedly given with sincerity and benevolence on the part of Christ. Of course, it was intended by him, that the design expressed in it was really formed in his mind, and will be faithfully accomplished. This design is completely expressed in the commission itself. As the apostles were directed to disciple all nations, or to make disciples every where ; so it was the design of Christ, that disciples should every where be made by them. In this business they were to have a real agency. It therefore follows irresistibly, that they had a real agency in it ; such an agency as that, without their exertions, these men would, in the established course of things, never have become disciples.

3. *The same doctrine is proved by the whole course of facts relating to the existence and progress of Christianity in the world.*

Wherever the gospel has been preached and read, mankind have actually been made disciples of Christ. In every age and in every country to which the gospel has come, there have been many such disciples. In those countries, on the contrary, where the gospel has not existed, such disciples have not been made ; or, at least, evidence of their discipleship has not been furnished to their fellow-men. I speak here, it will be remembered, of the ordinary course of God's spiritual providence. That exceptions to this assertion may have existed, I am not disposed to

deny. That they must have been comparatively few, is I think clearly evident from the fact, that no satisfactory reasons have appeared, even to the mind of charity itself, to believe them numerous. If God has pursued in countries unenlightened by the gospel a different system of dispensations from that which we have been contemplating, it must be admitted, that we have no evidence of this fact; or at least none which can be pronounced satisfactory. The Scriptures certainly give us very little information of this nature; and the history of mankind furnishes still less. Without limiting the mercy of God, or attempting to investigate his spiritual providence with respect to nations who have not the gospel, it may safely be concluded, that the instances which they furnish, of apparent renovation, are very few.

A benevolent man, who casts his eye over the western wilderness, and surveys with attention the moral conduct of its inhabitants, will find very little of this nature to satisfy his wishes or his hopes. Independently of the moral effects produced upon these nations by the labours of missionaries, he will find sin prevailing and ravaging, in all the forms of turpitude compatible with their circumstances, and in every degree not forbidden by their poverty, ignorance, and imbecility. Our Saviour has taught us, that we are to discern the character of men by their fruits. This equitable and decisive rule of judging is no less applicable to these nations than to ourselves. But what are the fruits produced by these men? Certainly they are not such as are 'meet for repentance;' such as spring from confidence in God; such as indicate, even remotely, the influence, or even the existence, of real virtue. After the most charitable and indulgent allowance for their ignorance; after all the palliations which the most benevolent mind can elicit from their moral disadvantages; their fraud, treachery, cruelty, pride, implacability, and revenge, present a picture of depravity which it is impossible not to understand and acknowledge. No penitents, in the mean time, are visible

among them. No symptoms of reformation are found. On the contrary, one unvarying, sluggish, gloomy stream of corruption appears to have flowed heavily onward from remote generations to the present hour; and to wind its Lethean course through all these nations, wherever and however situated.

On the ground once inhabited by these people, the New England colonists have dwelt almost two centuries. Among them religion has generally prevailed. The proof is that which has been already mentioned. They have brought forth the fruits specified in the gospel, as evidences of a virtuous character, in instances whose number it would be difficult to limit. Whence this mighty difference in nations planted on the same soil, and living under the same climate? The only satisfactory answer is, that the people of New England have possessed the gospel and its ordinances, have built churches, settled ministers, attended the public worship of God, read the Scriptures, and educated their children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' None of these things were possessed or done by their savage predecessors. In a word, the people of New England have had the gospel; the savages have not.

In those countries also where the gospel has been enjoyed, and disciples have actually been made, all or almost all persons of this character have become disciples by means of the gospel itself. Such persons, with scarcely an exception, probably without an exception, when conversing on their regeneration, declare that every thing in their own minds, which yields them consolation or hope, is in their view fairly referable to the truths of the gospel, presented to them in some form or other. A vast multitude date all their hopes from the preaching of the gospel; and feel completely assured, that 'faith,' if it has come to them at all, has come 'by hearing,' as hearing has 'by the word of God.' Others attribute this blessing to the indirect influence of preaching, operating upon their minds through a succession of events. Others ascribe it to an early religious education, making

deep impressions on their minds, in the happy period of childhood. Others still attribute it to the reading of the Scriptures, to the reading of religious books, to the religious conversation of good men, or to the life and conduct of such men. In these several ways the truths of the gospel are often exhibited with peculiar strength, beauty, and efficacy. The mode in which they are conveyed to the mind is of no other importance than as it renders the truths themselves more explicit, or more impressive. The truths are the substance and the soul of this interesting process.

As the language of all such persons concerning this subject is the same, it must I think be admitted to be true. Their number has been too great to allow the suspicion, that they can all have been deceived. They have lived in so many ages and countries, have been of so many different characters, have received so widely different educations, have lived in so widely different circumstances, and have entertained in other respects so widely different opinions, as to render it incredible that they should all have been prejudiced concerning this subject, and impossible, that they should have united in exactly the same set of prejudices. At the same time, multitudes of them have been eminently distinguished for wisdom, candour, and self knowledge. It cannot be reasonably supposed, that immense numbers of such men should, with respect to such a subject, be uniformly deceived in exactly the same manner. Beyond all this, it appears, at least to me, to be an indefensible imputation upon the character of God, to suppose that he would in this case leave his children to false apprehensions, and suffer them universally to believe that this mighty blessing came to them all in a way which was imaginary, and by means to which it was in no degree attributable.

From these considerations it may, I think, with the highest probability be concluded, that mankind are sanctified through, or by means of, the truth of God.

To all that has been here alleged, it may, however, be objected, that in the Scriptures our sanctification, particularly our regeneration, is ascribed directly and solely to the agency of the Holy Ghost; and that the doctrine contended for in this Discourse contradicts this part of the scriptural scheme.

To this objection I answer, that the doctrine for which I contend is as plainly asserted, and in as many passages of the Scriptures, as that which is alleged in the objection. If, then, we deny the former of these doctrines, we shall do violence to as many and as plain scriptural declarations, as if we deny the latter. Our dislike of the doctrine asserted in this Discourse, will in no degree justify us in rejecting or contravening those passages of Scripture in which it is asserted. They stand upon their own basis; the authority and inspiration of that Divine Spirit, who, while he challenges this agency to himself, has been pleased to attribute also this instrumentality to his word. His declarations we are bound to receive as we find them; and cannot alter the obvious meaning, with any better warrant than we can challenge for altering the words which contain that meaning.

It may be farther objected, that *this doctrine robs God of his peculiar glory in regenerating the soul of man.*

To this I answer, that we are, at the best, incompetent judges of this subject; and are therefore unable to determine satisfactorily in what manner God will be most glorified. If God has thought proper to give us such an account of the subject as has been here specified, it will be found, in the end, that he is more glorified in the manner conformed to these declarations, than in any other. The psalmist, under the unerring influence of inspiration, says to God, 'Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.' Should it prove one of the ways in which God magnifies his word, that it is constituted the means of regeneration to mankind; there can be no reasonable doubt that it will be found, in the end, perfectly consistent with the most perfect glorification of his name.

The truth however is, that neither of these answers is at all necessary to satisfy us concerning these objections. The Spirit of God is in truth the only agent in renovating man ; or, in other words, the only efficient cause of his renovation. This, however, he would be in as perfect a degree, if he were supposed to employ means in accomplishing this change of character, as if he were supposed to accomplish it without them. The supposition, that an agent, if he employ means to effectuate his purposes, will on this account cease to be, or be at all less, an agent, is built upon no known principles of truth or evidence.

The farmer and gardener turn their soil, and plant their seeds : the rain descends upon them, and the sun shines ; but all these things do not make them spring up and yield their increase. God must still interpose with his creative power, to produce these desirable effects ; or a crop will be expected in vain. God therefore is the sole agent and author of the crop ; yet the farmer and the gardener, the ground and the seed, the rain and the sunshine, are all means of its existence. Without these means, there would, according to the established order of things, be no crop. Of course, they are means of its existence, and means indispensable.

It may be said, that *these cases are not similar*. If this should be said, it would I think be said rashly : for Christ himself, St. Peter, St. James, and St. Paul, have all chosen this allusion to illustrate this very subject. See the parable of the Sower. See also, 1 Cor. iii. where Paul declares himself to have planted, Apollos to have watered, and God to have given the increase.

With regard to the other objection, it is obvious that, so far as we can see, the glory of regenerating man is all ascribed to God, and all ascribed in the manner most honourable to him ; is attributed to his Spirit as the efficient cause, and to his word as the means. If he has in fact, as, if I mistake not, I have proved, declared that this is the manner in which he has chosen to accomplish this work ; we need not

be afraid that in giving this account of it we shall detract from his character.

REMARK.

If the scheme of Discourse which has been here exhibited is just, it will follow, that *the gospel is to be preached to sinners.*

My audience may perhaps wonder that any evidence should be thought necessary to prove this assertion. If I am not misinformed, however, the assertion has not only been questioned, but denied. That such should have been the fact, is certainly wonderful in my view, as well as in that of others.

When the gospel was first preached by Christ, the whole world, with very few exceptions, was in a state of sin. The Gentiles were so generally of this character, that, as a body, they were styled, by St. Paul, 'sinners of the Gentiles,' Gal. ii. 15. To the Gentiles, however, Paul was sent directly by Christ to preach the gospel. The extraordinary commission of this apostle deserves to be here repeated: 'Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee; to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by faith that is in me,' Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

Here it is to be remarked, that St. Paul was sent to the Gentiles, not only to preach the gospel, and 'to open their eyes;' but 'to turn them also from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' Accordingly, he 'was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision; but shewed first to them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.'

These declarations made by St. Paul are unanswerably evinced to be true by the history of his life. In the very manner here recited he preached to both Jews and Gentiles the glad tidings of salvation; and

persuaded men every where to renounce and forsake their iniquities ; and thus actually opened their eyes, and turned them from darkness to light.

The beginning of the preaching of Christ, as recited in the gospel according to St. Mark, is in these words . ' The time is fulfilled ; the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent ye, and believe the gospel.' The people therefore whom he addressed had not hitherto repented nor believed. Of course they were sinners. In the whole history contained in the Gospel and in the Acts, there is not, so far as I recollect, a single instance recorded, in which we have any satisfactory proof that even an individual sinner was regenerated without the influence of divine truth upon his heart. On the contrary, these writings are full of examples, in which the efficacy of this truth is asserted directly, as having been indispensably concerned in producing this change in man.

The same doctrine is also amply exhibited, as it respects the Jewish church. Of the priests, the ordinary ministers of that church, whose proper office it was to teach the Scriptures to the Israelites, God says in the prophet Malachi, ' The law of truth was in their mouth ; and they turned many away from iniquity.' This declaration is a complete history of the fact in question, so far as the present subject is concerned, throughout all the preceding ages of the Jewish church.

What was true concerning the periods contained in the scriptural history, has been equally true, so far as we have any information, of the periods which have since elapsed. Ministers have every where, and in every age of the Christian church, preached to sinners ; and sinners under their preaching have been turned to God. In all these facts the duty of ministers at the present time is distinctly seen, and gloriously encouraged. He who would preach as the priests preached, as Christ preached, as the apostles preached, will proclaim the tidings of salvation to sinners ; and will urge them unceasingly to faith, repentance, and holiness. Upon his preaching, if

faithfully conducted in this manner, and accompanied by his own prayers, and those of the Christians around him, he may confidently look for the blessing of God.

SERMON CXXXVI.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

WHAT THEY ARE; AND WHAT IS THEIR INFLUENCE.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.—1 COR. iv. 15

IN the last Discourse, I attempted to prove, that there are means of grace and salvation: the first subject, then proposed for discussion. I shall now endeavour,

II. *To shew what they are.*

III. *To explain their influence.*

The means of grace may be distributed into a greater or less number of divisions, without any material disadvantage. At the present time it will, however, be useful to mention only those which are of peculiar importance.

Of these, the gospel, by which I here intend the Scriptures at large, is ever to be regarded as the sum: for it plainly involves them all. The gospel is especially to be considered as being efficacious to salvation, when it is *preached*: this being that institution of God, to which his peculiar blessing, 'life for evermore,' is especially annexed in the gospel itself. Still, it is ever to be remembered, that in every lawful, serious use of its instructions, precepts, warnings, threatenings, invitations, and promises, it is possessed of the same general nature and influence.

When we speak of the *means* of grace, in the plural, we always intend, either *different modes* of applying the *gospel*, or some or other of its *precepts*, or

ordinances, to the human understanding, or affections ; or the performance of some act, or series of acts, enjoined in the Scriptures.

It will be proper farther to observe, that the phrase which I have here used, is commonly employed to denote both the *means by which*, in the usual course of providence, *grace is originally obtained* ; and the *means of increasing it*, when once obtained.

Under this head are included,

I. *The preaching of the gospel.*

II. *The reading of the Scriptures.*

III. *Prayer.*

IV. *Correspondence with religious men.*

V. *Religious meditation ; particularly self-examination.*

VI. *The religious education of children.*

To these may be added, as efficacious to the same end, although differing in several respects from all those already mentioned, *the instructive and monitory, the merciful and afflictive, dispensations of Divine Providence, to ourselves and others.* It ought to be remembered, that I consider none of these as means of grace, in any other sense than as *they display, and impress upon the mind, the truth of God.*

In the Scriptures all these things appear to sustain the character which I have attributed to them.

‘ The law of the Lord,’ says David, ‘ is perfect ; converting the soul : the testimonies of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple.’—‘ Search the Scriptures,’ says our Saviour to the Jews, ‘ for in them ye think ye have the words of eternal life.’—‘ How shall they believe,’ says St. Paul, ‘ in him, of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? So, then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.’—‘ God be merciful to me a sinner !’ said the publican, ‘ who wen up to the temple to pray :’ and our Saviour informs us, that ‘ he went down to his house, justified rather than the Pharisee.’—‘ He that walketh with wise men,’ says Solomon, ‘ shall be wise.’—‘ Examine yourselves,’ says St. Paul, ‘ whether ye be in the

faith; prove your ownelves: know ye not your ownelves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate?' This exhortation is obviously given to persons supposed by the apostle to be, individually, of different moral characters; and is plainly given to them all, whatever their character might be. 'Stand in awe,' said David to his enemies, 'and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed; and be still.'—'Keep thy heart,' said David to Solomon, 'with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'—'Train up a child in the way he should go,' says Solomon, 'and when he is old he will not depart from it:' and again, 'The reproofs of instruction are the way of life.'—'Fathers,' says St. Paul, 'train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.'

These and many other passages, of a nature generally similar, I consider as directing, either mediately or immediately, the conduct of sinners. Most of them are so obviously of this character, as apparently to admit of no dispute. A part of them may I am aware, admit of objections to this construction. But, if these were to be given up, the rest would, I apprehend, be abundantly sufficient to answer the purpose for which they have been quoted. That they are directed to such objects as I have termed means of grace, will not be questioned.

With the instruction furnished us concerning this subject by the word of God, we are bound to unite that also which is exhibited to us by his providence. If certain measures have been customarily crowned with success in the pursuit of salvation; and other measures, or the omission of these successful ones, have terminated without that success; then we are warranted to conclude, that the course which has been heretofore successful, will be again. We are warranted to conclude, that what God has usually blessed, he may confidently be expected to bless; and that the conduct which has been regularly followed by impenitence and unbelief, will produce hereafter no other consequences.

But, so far as men can judge, one general course of conduct has, in fact, been usually crowned with success in this mighty concern, from the beginning. The preaching and hearing of the gospel, and the diligent, anxious use of those which I have styled means of grace, have been actually followed by faith, repentance, and holiness, from the promulgation of the gospel to the present time. The same things may therefore be reasonably expected to produce the same consequences hereafter.

III. *I shall now endeavour to explain the influence of these means on mankind.*

Before I begin this explanation, I wish to remark, that although I should fail of giving a satisfactory account of this subject, the failure would, in no degree, affect the truth of the doctrine. If the evidence alleged has been sufficient, and the conclusions have been fairly drawn; then the doctrine is true. Nor will my ignorance, or that of any other persons, concerning the manner in which the event referred to is accomplished, and the doctrine true, make any difference with respect to the principal point. We know perfectly the existence of many facts; while of the manner in which they are accomplished, we are unable to form any adequate conception.

The influence of the means of grace upon mankind may, if I mistake not, be explained under the two general heads of *instruction*, and *impression*.

These I shall now consider in the order already specified.

1. *The means of grace become such by instruction.*

It will be universally acknowledged, that men, according to St. Paul's declaration, cannot 'believe on him, of whom they have not heard; nor call on him, in whom they have not believed.' If God, the Father, or the Son, be unknown; it is plain, that he can neither be trusted, invoked, nor obeyed. There can be no known relation in this case between the creature and the Creator; and therefore, on the part of the creature, no known or possible duty to

to worship God in the sanctuary, or to use any of the means of grace.

It will be farther asked, *Whether the man, who performs the act merely, can be said to obey the command of God?* What is here actually done is easily understood; so easily as to admit of neither debate nor doubt. The person in question performs the act which God requires. But if he does not perform it cordially, he is not obedient in the cordial or virtuous sense.

I shall perhaps be asked still farther, *Whether the man who performs the act merely is any better for performing it, than if he had neglected or refused to perform it?* I answer, that, supposing the man's disposition substantially the same in both cases, he is less sinful when he performs the act, than when he neglects or refuses to perform it. This I say with confidence, because God has said it repeatedly, and in the most unambiguous manner. Of several kings of Judah, who were plainly sinners, particularly of Joash and Amaziah, it is directly said, that 'they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.' Of Joash it is said, that 'he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.' Of Amaziah it is said, that 'he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart;' that is, not with a good or virtuous heart. In other words, these princes performed those external actions which God had required. The same thing in substance is declared concerning several other kings of Judah. But who can doubt, that to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, whatever it may be which is thus right, is less sinful than to do that which is wrong in the sight of the Lord? Who can doubt, that these declarations are intentionally commendatory; and that they exhibit these princes as thus far less sinful than those, of whom it is said, that 'they did evil in the sight of the Lord?'

The same sentence of God concerning the same subject is given us, in another form, in the cases of

to save them that believe.'

In the same manner *religious education, meditation, correspondence with religious men, and the reading of religious books*, becomes thus far means of salvation to mankind. In all these ways the word of God is made known to mankind: and all of them have, and were designed by God to have, their peculiar advantages.

Among the things most necessary to be known by us, in order to our salvation, our own hearts or moral characters, hold a primary place. I know of no manner in which he who feels himself to be whole, can realize that he needs a physician. To the existence even of a wish for deliverance, the sense of danger or distress is absolutely necessary. If we are now conscious of being holy, or of being safe, we certainly can never desire renovation, forgiveness, or expiation; nor seek for a deliverer to save us. While such a consciousness continues, no reason can be perceived by the man who experiences it, why he should look for salvation from Christ, any more than why an angel who has never fallen, should look for salvation from the same source. But sin, and the moral distress and danger occasioned by it, have their seat in the heart. If then the heart be unknown, these will also be unknown; and the mind will never seek nor wish for deliverance from them. Of course, it cannot and will not expect its salvation from the Redeemer.

The knowledge of the heart is extensively communicated by the Scriptures: so extensively, that without them mankind will never understand their true moral character in any such manner as to produce any evangelical benefit. But all the scriptural communications of this nature will be useless to us, unless we apply them to ourselves. This application can never be made to any purpose, unless we 'commune with our own hearts.' *Self-examination* is the direct, and in many respects the only mode in which we apply the scriptural accounts of our moral nature to ourselves. Without such examination we

may indeed admit the scriptural accounts concerning human nature, generally ; and believe that other men are sinners, in the manner and degree there exhibited. But we shall never realize that these accounts, in their whole extent, are applicable also to ourselves. Particularly, we shall form no just apprehensions of our odiousness in the sight of God, of the extent of our condemnation by his law, or our exposure to final perdition. The necessity of such examination is therefore absolute.

Farther : When we have in fact become convinced of our sin and our danger, we are still equally unconvinced of our indisposition to return to God by evangelical repentance and faith. All mankind appear originally to believe their conversion to God to be so absolutely in their power, as that, whenever they shall make serious and earnest attempts to accomplish it, they shall accomplish it of course, and without any peculiar divine assistance. Whatever opinions they may imagine themselves to form concerning this subject, they still believe, and if they ever become penitents, will find themselves to have believed, that whenever they shall resolve upon the exercise of faith and repentance, as necessary to their moral character and true well-being, they shall certainly repent and believe. In this way they feel in a great measure secure of salvation. It is a secret, which probably no professed believer in the doctrines of free grace ever discovers, before he has made attempts of this nature, that, with all his apprehended orthodoxy, he still places his ultimate reliance on himself ; and realizes no necessity for any peculiar assistance from God. Among the things which he feels to be thus absolutely in his power, *prayer*, that is, *evangelical and acceptable prayer*, is always one. Nothing in the ordinary course of things, not even his own speculative belief to the contrary, will ever persuade him, that he will find any difficulty in praying to God, until after he has seriously made the trial. *His own efforts to pray* will usually be the first and the only means of changing this opi-

nion, and of convincing him that he has essentially mistaken his real character.

Actual attempts at prayer, at exercising faith and repentance, and at forming efficacious resolutions of obedience, furnish in this case a kind of instruction, not easily supplied by any thing else. Conviction of the practicability or impracticability of any measures of the insufficiency of our own powers, and of the certain failure of our efforts, is wrought only by the trial of these measures, powers, and efforts. A loose, general, uninfluential belief may be otherwise entertained. But a conviction which will be felt, will be gained only in this manner. I know not whether, in all ordinary cases, this conviction is not indispensable to the attainment of holiness.

In the conduct and character of religious men, the actual existence of religion is often, perhaps usually, first seen and believed. In the same manner is the dignity and beauty, and the excellence of religion usually first discerned and acknowledged. The truth also, and especially the importance of many primary doctrines of the gospel, and the chief part of what is commonly intended by experimental religion, are all principally learned and realized by means of their conversation.

These may serve as specimens, sufficient for the present purpose, of the instruction acquired in the use of the means of grace.

2. *Means of grace become such by the impressions which they make on the heart.*

To a person at all versed in human nature it is perfectly evident, that in every case where men are to be moved to any serious exertion, mere conviction will often be inefficacious. The intellect is not the motive faculty of the mind. The will, in which term I include all the affections, gives birth to every effort which the mind makes concerning the objects of the present or the future world. But the mere conviction of the intellect is of itself rarely sufficient to move the will, or engage the affections. Something farther is in a particular manner necessary to engage

man in the serious pursuit of spiritual and eternal objects, or to make him realize any serious interest in these objects. The mere proof, that a doctrine is true, is usually but one step towards persuading us to exertion of any kind. In addition to this, it is commonly necessary for the same end, that our imagination be roused, and our affections awakened and engaged.

In accordance with these observations, mankind, in their customary language, regularly express the different states of the mind, when it is merely convinced, and when it feels the truth of which it is convinced. To *see* a truth, and to *feel* it, are familiar expressions in our language, which denote ideas widely different from each other. So different are they, that we commonly see, without feeling at all; and therefore without being moved to exertion by what we see. All men use, all men understand, this language; and thus prove that there is a solid foundation in the nature of things for the distinction which it expresses.

In accordance with this scheme, eloquence, both in speaking and writing, has ever been directed to the imagination, and to the passions, as well as to the intellect: and that kind of eloquence which has been employed in moving the heart, has been considered as possessing a higher and more influential nature, than that which is addressed merely to the understanding. Hence, eloquence itself is commonly considered, rather as the power of persuasion, than the power of conviction.

That we are capable of being moved to a sense of spiritual objects, altogether different from a cold, unimpassioned conviction, as truly as to such a sense of temporal objects, cannot admit of a rational doubt. Every minister of the gospel, every moralist, and every other man, who labours to amend the human character, even those who deny the doctrine for which I am contending, prove that they adopt this opinion, by using to the utmost of their power the means of impression for this end, as well as those of

conviction. In this conduct they shew, more evidently than is possible by any other method, that they realize this difference, and to avail themselves of it, employ these means.

The Scriptures themselves are universally formed in this manner. They are every where filled with instruction ; but they are also filled every where with persuasion. Instead of being a cold compilation of philosophical dogmas, they are filled with real life, with facts, with persons, with forcible appeals to the imagination, and with powerful applications to the heart. With these the instruction is every where interwoven. By these it is continually embodied. In the Bible no affection of the human heart is unaddressed. Our hope and fear, our love and hatred, our sorrow and joy, our desire and aversion, nay our taste for beauty, novelty, and sublimity, for moral glory and greatness, are all alternately and most forcibly applied to, in order that the whole man, as a being possessed of imagination and affections, as well as of understanding, may be alarmed, allured, and compelled, to return from sin, embrace holiness, and live for ever.

Now the Scriptures were published to a world of sinners , and with the most merciful design of bringing them to repentance and salvation. To *them*, in a peculiar manner is a great part of the Scriptures addressed. They are profitable in all their parts : and are contrived by Infinite Wisdom so as best to compass the end for which they were written. They teach, that we may see, they impress, that we may feel, divine truth in the most profitable manner.

In the promotion of this end, all the means of grace conspire. By an early and well-directed *religious education*, such truths as children can understand are conveyed to their minds with a force eminently impressive, and singularly lasting. The state of the mind itself is here peculiarly favourable to the design of making deep impressions ; and has hence been particularly regarded by God in those **precepts** which enjoin such an education at this pe-

riod. The efficacy of these impressions is strongly declared in that remarkable passage, already quoted from the Book of Proverbs: 'Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it.'

What is true of religious education is also true of all the means of grace which I have specified. *Public worship* is plainly formed with a particular design to affect the heart of man by those truths which are taught in the house of God. The day, the place, the occasion, are all in the highest degree solemn and interesting. The numbers united in the worship, necessarily communicate and receive the strong feelings of sympathy; and regard the subjects of instruction with emotions widely different from those which would be experienced in solitude. The nature of the ordinances is also in a singular degree solemn, awful, and affecting. In a word, every thing pertaining to the subject is in the happiest manner fitted to move the mind, and deeply to instamp on it the truths of the gospel.

Prayer, in the like manner, is eminently fitted to teach, and not only to teach, but to make us feel the various doctrines of religion. Prayer, in every form, is a service, peculiarly impressive. In the church, in the family, and in the closet, it is attended by pre-eminent advantages. When we retire to our 'closet,' and 'shut the door' on the world, and all which it contains; and 'pray to our Father, who is in secret,' we are withdrawn from all external things; are fixed on our own concerns; our guilt, our danger, our helplessness; our dependance on God alone for hope, sanctification, and deliverance; and our absolute necessity of being interested in Christ, as the only expiation for sin, and the only safety to man. We bring God before us, 'face to face;' and 'see eye to eye.' The awful and transcendent character of this great and glorious Being rises up to our view, in a manner resembling that in which the Israelites contemplated it at the foot, or Moses on the summit, of Mount Sinai. The nearness of the

judgment is realized with singular force, and the approach of the final recompense anticipated with profound awe, and most salutary apprehensions.

Among the things which, in the attempts to perform this duty, are deeply impressed on the soul of the sinner, *his own inability to pray in a manner acceptable to God*, is one of the most important and affecting. No sinner realizes this truth before he has made the attempt in earnest. Nor does any thing appear to lay low the pride, and annihilate the self-righteousness of the human heart in the same effectual manner. When he attempts to pray, and in the very act of attempting it finds clear and practical proof that his prayers are *selfish, cold, and heartless*, he first begins to feel in a useful manner his absolute dependance on God for every good disposition. Prayer is naturally the last hope, the last consolation of man. So long as we can ask for mercy, we never feel entirely unsafe. But when the soul becomes satisfied by actual trial that its prayers are such as itself condemns; it becomes also satisfied, that its only ultimate dependance is on the mere mercy of God.

Prayer also in the same effectual manner opens to the view of the soul, with peculiar power, its whole moral state; its guilt, its exposure, and its ruin. All these things, when brought up to view in its converse with God, in making them the subjects of its own confessions and requests, and in revolving them with the most solemn and interesting meditation, all enhanced by a realizing sense of the presence of God, are felt by the soul with a peculiar energy, usually followed by happy effects.

Each of the other means of grace which I have specified has its own, and that a very desirable power of affecting the heart. We are so formed as to be capable of deep impressions in various ways, and from many different sources. Each way has its peculiar efficacy; and every source is copious in its influence on the mind.

The great objects concerning which these impressions are especially needed, and are actually made,

are the guilt and danger of sin; the glorious mercy of God in redeeming, sanctifying, and forgiving sinners; the absolute dependance of the soul on him for all good, both natural and moral; and his willingness to communicate both through Jesus Christ. These united and thoroughly understood, constitute those views and awaken those emotions which, together, are commonly styled *convictions of conscience*; or, to speak perhaps with more precision, that awakened state of the conscience which usually precedes regeneration; and which, in the ordinary course of God's providence, seems indispensable to its existence. Converse with as many religious men as you please concerning this subject, and every one of them will declare that he has passed through a state of mind substantially of this nature; and will inform you that it anteceded every hope of reconciliation to God, and every exercise which he has believed to be genuine religion in itself. Such then may be deemed one of the laws of the moral or spiritual kingdom; a law which appears to be formed with supreme wisdom, and with supreme benevolence to the sinner. If he were never to entertain such a sense of sin, if he were never to have such apprehensions of his danger, if he were never thus to feel his dependance on his Maker, he could not I think form any just views of the nature or greatness of his deliverance; nor of the goodness of God in rescuing him from destruction, sanctifying his soul, and blotting out his transgressions nor of the importance or excellence of that holiness with which he is endued; nor of the nature and glory of that happiness to which he will gain a final admission. In a word, it seems indispensable that such a state of mind should precede his regeneration, in order to enable him, throughout all his future being, to understand what God has done for him, and to feel the gratitude actually felt by the minds, and joyfully expressed in the praises, of the first-born.

Some persons, when considering this subject, appear to feel as if regeneration could not be absolutely attributed to the Spirit of truth, unless it was accom-

plished altogether without the employment of means. But this opinion is plainly erroneous. The very means themselves are furnished entirely by this Divine Agent. When furnished, all of them united would prove wholly inefficient without his creative influence. No man in his sober senses ever mistrusted that ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, would produce wheat. The almighty power of God, after all these things have operated to the utmost, is absolutely necessary even to the germination of the seed, and still more obviously to the perfection of the plant. In the same manner, whatever means may be employed in bringing man from sin to holiness, and whatever may be their influence, the creative power of the Divine Spirit is absolutely necessary to accomplish his renovation. All that can be truly said in this case is, that this glorious Person operates in one manner, and not in another.

The human soul is not regenerated in the same manner with that in which the dust of the ground was originally made into a human body. In this case, a mere act of divine power, unconnected with every thing else, accomplished the effect. But, before renewing man, God is pleased in the usual course of his spiritual providence, to instruct him, to alarm, to invite, to promise, and to persuade. To prove the usefulness of these means, nothing more seems necessary than to observe that they always precede or attend our renovation; that is always in the usual course of providence. It is the soul which is thus taught, alarmed, and allured, upon which descends the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit; and not the soul uninstructed, unawakened, thoughtless of its guilt, and devoted only to the pursuit of sensual objects. *The whole history of experimental religion, both within and without the Scriptures, is, unless I am deceived, a complete confirmation of this truth.*

But to the existence of this state of the soul, the means of grace, as I have described them, and their influence, appear to be indispensable. By the instructions which they communicate on the one hand,

and the impressions which they make on the other, concerning spiritual objects, they appear whenever employed with seriousness, fervour, and perseverance, to bring the soul into this interesting and profitable situation. It is I conceive with reference to this fact, that God says, 'Is not my word as the fire, and as the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' With reference to this fact, Christ says, that 'his words are spirit and life;' and that 'they will make men free from the bondage of corruption.' With the same reference, Paul declares the gospel to be 'the power of God unto salvation;' and 'the word of God' to be 'quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.' From this power of the gospel was derived the fact, that the Jews who crucified Christ were in such numbers 'pricked in the heart' by the preaching of St. Peter, and cried out, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'

All the efficacy which I have attributed to the means of grace does not, I acknowledge, amount to regeneration, nor ensure it. But it amounts to what St. Paul terms 'planting' and 'watering.' The 'increase' must be, and still is, given by God only. In the same manner, God must create the grain; or the husbandman, after all his ploughing and sowing, after all the rain and the sunshine, will never find a crop. Still, these are indispensable means of his crop; so indispensable, that without them the crop would never exist. As truly, in the ordinary course of providence, there will, without the use of the means of grace, be no spiritual harvest. There will be no instructions given, no impressions made, and no realizing convictions of guilt, danger, and dependance produced: and without these, there will be no regeneration of the soul, and no title obtained to eternal life.

SERMON CXXXVII.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.—1 COR. iv. 15.

IN the first Discourse from these words, I proposed

- I. *To shew that there are means of grace;*
- II. *To shew what they are;*
- III. *To explain their influence;*
- IV. *To answer the principal objections to this scheme of doctrine.*

The three first of these subjects have been already discussed. I shall now,

IV. *Answer the principal objections to this scheme of doctrine.*

These, as they are customarily alleged, may be considered as chiefly made to two practical inferences, which I shall derive from the two preceding Discourses.

1. *It follows, from the observations made in these Discourses, that the means of grace ought to be used by sinners and by Christians, for the purpose of promoting the salvation of sinners.*

If there are means of grace and salvation given by God, then they were given for the very purpose of promoting the salvation of sinners. As this was the end which God proposed in communicating them to mankind, it is an end in which all men are bound to rejoice, and which they are plainly obligated to pursue. But unless these means are used by sinners for their own salvation, they will ordinarily be of no benefit to them; and, unless Christians use them also for the purpose of promoting the salvation

of sinners, they will fail of their intended effect. Christian ministers must preach the gospel to sinners. Christian parents must educate their sinful children 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.' Christians must live, and act, and converse with sinners: otherwise the salvation of sinners will usually be neglected, and therefore will be unattained.

Farther; if there *are* means of grace, then the appointment of them is wise; the communication of them to mankind, benevolent; and the use of them by those for whom they were appointed, proper. It can hardly be supposed, that God has provided and published means of salvation to mankind, and yet by his own authority made it improper that they should be used. According to this scheme, sinners, although expressly commanded to 'flee from the wrath to come,' to 'seek the Lord while he may be found,' and to 'turn from the error of their way,' are yet by divine authority, precluded from the very measures which alone will, in the usual course of things, produce the effect enjoined.

That Christians are bound to employ the means of grace for the salvation of sinners, will not, I suppose, be doubted. That sinners must employ them also in various respects, is evinced by this very position, as well as by the observations made in the preceding Discourses.

If the gospel is to be preached to sinners, *they* must *hear*. If Christian parents are to 'train up' their 'children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' they must *listen* to their instructions. If sinners are to become acquainted with the word of God, or even to know whether that which is preached to them is the word of God or not, they must *read* the Scriptures. If sinners are to be informed of the reality, power, and excellency of religion, they must *converse* with religious men. If they are to understand and feel their guilt, they must *commune with their own hearts*. If they are ever to know the real nature of their character and efforts, they must *pray*.

From their own use of the means of grace almost all their deep impressions of their guilt, danger, dependance on Christ, and absolute need of the regenerating influence of the Spirit of God, must be derived. In a word, if they are to obtain salvation, as most or all other Christians have obtained it, indeed, if they are to obtain it at all, in the ordinary course of providence, they must obtain it in the use of the means of grace. This is the way which God has ever blessed, and will undoubtedly bless hereafter. Nor are we warranted to hope for his blessing in any other manner.

To the proofs of this point, alleged in this and the preceding Discourses, I shall add but one at the present time. God, in the dispensation which he revealed to Moses, required all the Israelites to use continually all the means of grace furnished to them in the then existing scriptural canon. The parent, however sinful he might be, who did not circumcise his man-child upon the eighth day, was by the express law of God punished with the excision of that child. Every male was expressly required to present himself three times a year before the Lord; that is, at the tabernacle, or in the temple. All were required to keep the appointed feasts, particularly to celebrate the passover. They were required, without distinction, to offer the various appointed sacrifices, to educate their children religiously, and to seek the law at the mouths of the priests, its ordinary ministers. It is remarkable, that for the omission of these duties they were, in several instances, to be punished with excision; particularly such as did not 'afflict themselves' on the great day of atonement; Lev. xxiii. 29; such as, being ceremonially clean, forbore to keep the passover; such as killed an ox, lamb, or goat, and did not bring it to the door of the tabernacle, to offer an offering unto the Lord; Lev. xvii. 4. Thus the Israelites, and in some of the cases the strangers who resided with them, were not only required, but required under this terrible sanction, punctiliously to use the

means of grace, both ordinary and extraordinary.

It is farther to be observed, that *the Israelites are nowhere, either in the Old or New Testament, censured for the fact, that they attended on these various means of grace.* They are often censured for their impenitence and unbelief, indeed ; and the more severely, for being impenitent and unbelieving in the midst of these solemn services, because the abuse of such privileges obviously enhanced their guilt. But not a hint is given us, either by Christ, the prophets, or the apostles, that they were censurable merely for being present when these means were employed by others, or for being active in employing them themselves for their own good. The gospel, therefore, regards this subject exactly as it was regarded by the law ; and has introduced no change in this respect into the divine dispensations.

2. *It follows, from the same Discourses, that ministers ought to advise and exhort sinners to use the means of grace.*

If God has appointed these means, and is daily blessing them, if he has usually, and not improbably always, wherever the gospel has been published, conveyed his spiritual blessings to men in this way ; then it cannot be reasonably doubted, that ministers ought to advise sinners to labour in this way to gain eternal life. As to sinners in general, this is the only way in which eternal life will be gained. Refusing them this advice, therefore, is no other than refusing them any advice concerning their salvation.

To this scheme it is however objected,

1. *That regeneration, being immediately and solely the work of the Spirit of God, is not at all accomplished by means ; and that therefore sinners, however strenuously they may use the means of grace, do in truth nothing towards this change of character.*

That the act of regenerating man is an act of the Divine Spirit alone, I readily admit, and fully believe ; but I deny the consequence drawn from this doctrine. If I am not deceived, I have, in both the preceding Discourses, particularly in the first, proved

it to be an error. The text itself, if I mistake not, is a decisive proof that it is an error. The text asserts, to say the least, that St. Paul, by his preaching, contributed to the regeneration of the Corinthian Christians. In a humbler sense he *begat* these Christians, as truly as God did in a higher sense. But if Paul contributed to the regeneration of these men by his preaching, the men themselves as certainly contributed to their own regeneration by being present at his discourses, by hearing them, by understanding them, and by feeling with strong impressions the truths which he uttered. Had not all this been done by *them*, St. Paul might, with exactly the same success have preached to the dead.

In the doctrine for which I contend there is, I apprehend, nothing embarrassing, and nothing which is even peculiar. God, as was observed in the first of these Discourses, is equally the sole Agent in the production of a crop. But it would be a palpable absurdity to conclude from this fact, that the crop would come into existence without the labours of the farmer. Were he not to plough and sow the ground, a child knows that not a stalk of wheat would be produced. St. Paul contributed as really to the *spiritual* harvest, as the farmer to the *natural* one, and in the same sense ; for without his labours that harvest would not have existed. Neither Paul nor the husbandman is at all concerned in the *creative act* of God, employed in each of these cases. But both of them do that, without which this creative act would not exist. Accordingly, where the gospel is not preached, regeneration does not take place ; as crops have no existence, where the earth is not cultivated.

2. It is objected, that the use of the means of grace on the part of sinners is itself sinful ; and that ministers therefore cannot conscientiously advise sinners to use these means ; since this would be no other than advising them to commit sin.

As this in all probability is the objection on which the greatest stress is laid, and that which has con-

tributed most to perplex those to whom, and not improbably those also by whom it is urged, I shall consider myself as justified in examining it at some length. It is presented in various lights. I will endeavour to follow the course pursued by the objectors themselves.

It is triumphantly alleged, that the Scriptures have decided the point in debate, and established the objection immoveably, by such declarations as the following:—‘The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,’ Prov. xv. 8. ‘The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a wicked mind,’* Prov. xxi. 27. ‘He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.’ Prov. xxviii. 9. If then the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; if the prayer of the wicked is an abomination; it cannot be lawful for the wicked to pray, nor for a minister to advise him to pray.

I have, I believe, alleged the objection in its full force, and in the very terms in which it is usually alleged. This, at least, has been my design.

It is not pretended, that sinners are in the Scriptures expressly forbidden to pray; nor that ministers are expressly forbidden to advise them to pray. The objection is *inferred* from other declarations of the Scriptures. Like other inferences, it is, however, to be suspected, until it shall be shewn to be certainly and necessarily derived from such declarations. The authority of a *certain* conclusion, fairly derived from the Scriptures, I admit. But in order to this admission, I must be satisfied that it is certain, and fairly derived from the Scriptures. Let us now examine this inference.

1. *The objection is founded on this general doctrine, that, whenever an individual will commit sin in any conduct, he cannot lawfully adopt, nor be lawfully advised to adopt, that conduct.*

* Especially when he offereth it to serve some base end.—HODGSON.

But from this doctrine it will follow, that sinners cannot lawfully do any thing, while in a state of sin, nor be lawfully advised to do any thing. There is as much certainty, that a sinner will sin in all other conduct which he adopts while he is a sinner, as in praying. 'The ploughing of the wicked' is expressly declared to be 'sin.' Prov. xxi. 4. 'The way of the wicked,' that is, his universal course of life, is declared to be 'an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. xv. 9. 'The thoughts of the wicked' are declared to be 'an abomination to the Lord,' Prov. xv. 26. Of course, the wicked cannot lawfully plough, think, nor live in the ordinary course of life, that is, converse, labour, buy, sell, and provide for their families; nor be lawfully advised to do these, or any of these things.

It will be remembered, that all these declarations, and all those quoted in a preceding paragraph, were written by an Israelite under the Mosaic dispensation; and written for men living also under the same dispensation. Yet, in that very dispensation, God required Moses to command all sinners of that nation to labour, to cultivate their own ground, to circumcise their children, to celebrate the passover, to offer sacrifices, to be present at the public worship of God, to hear and learn his word from the mouth of their priests, and to teach all these things to their children. It will not, I presume, be questioned, that Moses, in enjoining these things upon the sinful Israelites, as well as upon the virtuous ones, acted lawfully; or, in other words, was guilty of no sin. But what was lawful for Moses, in this case, is in itself lawful. Accordingly, it was lawfully done by all the ministers who followed him in the Jewish church. It cannot therefore fail to be lawful to Christian ministers, unless it has been plainly forbidden.

It will here be said, that Moses, in requiring this conduct of the sinful Israelites, neither commanded nor authorized them to continue sinners in performing it. This is unquestionably true. So far from

allowing them to continue in sin, he required them to perform these various duties from supreme love to God. Equally true is this of the Christian minister, in directing sinners to use the means of grace, or to perform any of the other duties of life. Instead of directing or allowing them to remain impenitent, he directs them to perform every duty with a virtuous disposition.

From this doctrine it will also follow, that it is unlawful to advise Christians themselves to use the means of grace, or indeed to adopt any course of conduct whatever. Both the Scriptures and observation teach us, that Christians continually sin; that they sin in their repentance, in their faith, in reading the Bible, in prayer, in the observance of the sabbath, in their attendance on public worship, in the education of their children, and in the ordinary business of life. Whatever conduct they adopt, we know that they will sin in performing it. On this principle, therefore, they cannot lawfully adopt, nor be lawfully advised to adopt, that conduct. Of course, as our Lord, when he directed the apostles to go and preach the gospel to every creature, knew that they would commit sin in obeying it, the direction itself, according to the scheme which I oppose, was unlawful.

It will here probably be asked, *What then shall be done? Shall we advise men to commit sin?* To this question I answer, that according to the spirit of the objection you must either advise them to nothing, not even to repent and believe; or you must advise them to commit sin: for, according to the objection, advising them to any thing, even to repent and believe, is advising them to commit sin.

But I apprehend that this account of the subject is as unfounded as the scheme enforced by it is impracticable. God, as it appears to me, deals with mankind, and, if he deals with them at all according to the system of providence which he has established, must deal with them as rational beings. As they are all originally sinners, every thing addressed

to them, either by God or man, must be addressed to sinners. He has commanded and exhorted sinners in his own person, and has required men also to teach and exhort them in his name. In these commands and exhortations two things are included. *the act to be done, and the disposition with which it is to be done.* The command or counsel sometimes includes both expressly, and sometimes but one. Such commands and counsels as direct to the performance of *the act*, direct to *that act which in the case stated is proper to be done*; and imply *the disposition with which it should be done.* Such as direct *the disposition*, require *that*, and *that only*, which is *virtuous.* Those, which require the act, regulate both the heart, and the external conduct. These, which require the disposition, regulate merely the affections of the heart.

Commands of both these kinds God has evidently given to men as rational beings merely, and often without discriminating at all their moral character. They are given to all men. The duties which these commands enjoin are numberless. They occur every day, and are as obligatory on the sinner as on the Christian. They bind with their whole force every man by whom they are known. Among these are prayer, attending public worship, reading the Scriptures, and industry in our lawful business. God requires every man to perform these various duties of life as they occur. He does not leave him at liberty to defer the performance, until he has discovered whether he is the subject of evangelical repentance. He requires the performance at the time; and, if the individual refuses, God will not hold him guiltless. But, it will be asked, Is not every action to be performed from supreme love to God? An answer to this question has already been given. This disposition is implied in every action which God requires ~~us~~ to perform; and God will accept of no performance which does not flow from this source. To such a performance only is an impenitent sinner directed, when he is directed to pray, to read the Scriptures,

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the Creator. 'Where there is no law, there is no transgression;' and where there is no knowledge, either actual or possible, of a law, there is, in the fullest sense, no law. The knowledge of God therefore, his law, and our obligation to obey it, is indispensable even to our possible obedience, or disobedience.

When mankind had fallen, and Christ had made an expiation for their sins; it was equally and absolutely necessary, in order to their acceptance of Christ, which then became their duty, that they should know this glorious Person, in such a sense as to enable them to exercise faith in him as their Redeemer. Without such knowledge, it is naturally impossible for us to believe in him at all. The same things are equally true of every religious duty, and subject. We cannot perform any duty, however well disposed, unless it be known to us: nor be required to perform it, unless such knowledge be attainable.

Thus, it is evident, that the gospel is indispensable to the very existence of Christianity in the mind of man: and, as the gospel cannot be of any possible use to man, unless known by him; so the knowledge of the gospel is indispensable to the existence of faith, repentance, and holiness.

It is indeed perfectly obvious, that God can, with infinite ease, reveal the fundamental truths, and all other truths of the gospel, to any man immediately, as he did to St. Paul. This, however, is not to be expected; as it is certainly no part of his ordinary providence. In the usual course of that providence, men are taught the gospel by *preaching, reading, and other modes of instruction*. These, or some of these, are therefore indispensable, in the usual course of things, to the existence of Christianity in the minds of men. Hence, in one respect, the gospel is said to be 'the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth:' and hence, in the same respect, it is said, that, 'when the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching

Ahab and Jehu. Of Ahab it is said, that when he heard the words of Elijah, announcing to him the destruction of his family, 'he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.' It is immediately subjoined, 'And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: in his son's days I will bring the evil upon his house.' Jehu was commissioned to destroy the family of Ahab. This commission he punctually executed. When he had finished this work, God said to him, 'Because thou hast done well in executing that which was right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in my heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.' Immediately it is subjoined, 'But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin.' Here we see both these princes rewarded, and expressly declared by God himself to be rewarded, for external actions merely; for both, in a manner equally express, are pronounced still to be gross sinners. But that which is declared by God to be rewarded by himself, is not so sinful conduct, as that which is either not thus rewarded, or is punished. Of Jehu, God says farther, 'Thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes.' He who has done well, in executing that which is *right* in the eyes of his Maker, has not done so ill, as he who has perpetrated that which is *wrong* in his eyes.

What is thus taught in the Scriptures may be advantageously illustrated by the common experience of ourselves. The person who does those actions which God requires, dishonours his Maker by his life far less, and contributes to the well-being of mankind far more than he who does them not, or who does the contrary actions. To the eye of mankind the actions themselves are often exactly the

same; and have exactly the same influence when performed by an unrenewed, as when performed by a renewed man. The actions of an unrenewed man, therefore, may have a very beneficent influence on the interests of mankind, when performed agreeably to those commands of God, which regulate the external conduct of men. According to the scheme here exhibited, the Israelites, as has been observed, were required to be present at the various religious services enjoined by the Mosaic law. Yet God perfectly knew, and all the succeeding prophets and teachers also knew, that the greater part by far of those to whom these requisitions were addressed, were sinners. Still they not only required them to repent and believe, but advised, exhorted, and commanded them also to do all these things. Nor would it have been any vindication to them for omitting the action, that their disposition was not sanctified; nor of the prophet or the priest for not exhorting them to the action, that they could not conscientiously advise sinners to any thing beside faith and repentance.

The same scheme is pursued throughout the New Testament. Christ, adopting the very language of the law, directed the ten lepers to go and shew themselves to the priest, in order to their cleansing. Luke xvii. 12. Nine of these lepers appear to have been sinners. This Christ knew as well before, as after. Yet he did not think this a difficulty in his way towards giving them this direction.

He directed a collection of Jews, of whom he testifies that they did not believe, to 'search the Scriptures,' for the purpose of discovering his true character; and this, plainly, in order to their faith. John v 39, 44.

He directed the young ruler, who plainly was not a believer, to 'go, and sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and come, and follow him.'

He directed the Herodians to 'render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.' They were sinners. But paying tribute was neither repenting nor believing.

He directed the scribe, in the parable of the good

Samaritan, to 'go and shew kindness to his enemies. Yet this scribe appears to have been an unbeliever.

He directed Paul also, after he had fallen to the earth, and inquired what he would have him to do; to 'arise, and go into Damascus, where it should be told him what he would have him to do.'

Peter, also, directed Simon Magus to 'repent, and pray that the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven.' It has been thought, that Peter directed him to repent first, and then to pray for forgiveness. This certainly is an unnatural construction of the passage. The obvious meaning is, that St. Peter directed both of these things to be done immediately; and without indicating any intention that Simon should wait until after he repented, before he began to pray. Many more examples of a similar nature might be added.

It will not be supposed, that in any one of these directions the objects of them were commanded or advised to commit sin. As rational beings, they were directed to do such things as, *in the character of actions*, were proper to be done in their circumstances; while a general indication of their duty, as to the *disposition* with which they were to be done, is unquestionably implied in all these passages.

These passages, however, shew that in his preaching and advice a minister is not to confine himself to the mere enjoining of faith and repentance; but is to extend them to any other conduct in itself proper to be pursued: while he universally teaches these great Christian duties, as the immediate end of all his preaching.

Antecedently to every effort which the sinner makes, he is wholly ignorant whether God will not enable him to obey with the heart. It is also his indispensable duty thus to obey. Whenever advice or exhortation is given to sinners by any minister, he is equally ignorant whether they will or will not obey with the heart, as well as with the outward conduct. He knows also, that it is their duty to obey in this manner. The effort therefore ought to be made, and the advice given.

In this manner I understand all those general commands and exhortations which respect the affairs of sinners. Our Saviour, preaching obviously to a collection of sinners, says, Luke xiii. 24, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate : ' and again, Matt. vii 14, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate : because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life ; and few there be that find it.' The gate is at the head of the way, leading to the house, into which those who enter at the gate are finally to be admitted. Christ never speaks of heaven as a city, but several times as a house. Those who have not entered are obviously sinners ; and to sinners he was obviously preaching in this kindred passage of St. Luke. Of the same nature is the memorable passage in Isa. lv. 6, 7, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found : call ye upon him while he is near.' The persons here addressed, are in the second verse mentioned as those who 'spend money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.' Such persons are obviously sinners. Still they are directed to seek and call upon the Lord.

If then it is still objected, *that directing sinners to such acts is directing them to commit sin ;* the answer is short. God gave these very directions to the Israelites by Moses. Christ also gave the same directions to the Jews. It will not be supposed that he directed them to commit sin.

It may be farther said, *that sinners will commit sin in their prayers.* If they continue sinners they undoubtedly will. So will Christians. If this be a reason, why sinners should not be advised to pray, it is also a reason why Christians should not be advised to pray.

But it will be replied, that 'the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord : while the prayer of the upright is his delight.' That the prayer of the wicked is in some respects an abomination—of hypocrites universally, of other sinners generally—is not to be questioned. There is plainly nothing

holy in the conduct of impenitent men. But it will not follow, that the prayer of every impenitent man is in such a sense abominable to God, as to ensure rejection from him. Christ did not tell the young ruler, that his inquiry concerning eternal life was abominable; nor refuse to hear and answer him. On the contrary, the Scriptures inform us, that 'Jesus, beholding him, loved him.' This love was plainly distinct from the general benevolence of Christ to sinners; for with this benevolence he loves all sinners. The young ruler he loved peculiarly and in a manner in which he did not love the Pharisees, and the Jews generally. Otherwise, the fact would not have been specified. He did not, I acknowledge, love him with complacency; for he was not a Christian. But he loved him peculiarly, with what is called natural affection. In the character of this youth there was a peculiar natural amiableness, such as all men see, love, and acknowledge, and acknowledge often against their own doctrines. The foundation of this love is a train of attributes belonging to man, not as a sinner, nor as a saint but as an intelligent being. Of this number are native sweetness of temper, frankness, sincerity simplicity, strongly seen in little children; gentleness, kindness, generosity, and compassion. All these are in themselves amiable in a certain degree; and in this degree they were loved by Christ.

Hence I argue, that, as all Christ's affections were exactly accordant with truth and propriety, so this exercise of affection to the young man was of the same nature, and was perfectly approved by God. Of course, there is at times something in sinners, which, in itself, is not abominable to God; although their moral or sinful character is altogether abominable.

It is not wrong in itself, that sinners should desire food, or raiment, or happiness, or safety from evil. It is impossible, that *percipient beings* should exist without desiring the two last of these objects and equally impossible, that *men* should not desire

the two first. The best men, and the worst, desire them alike : and no man is for this conduct ever re-proved in the Scriptures. To ask of God for happiness and final safety, is not necessarily insincere, nor guilty, even in sinners. When sinners ask for mere mercy, or mere happiness, or mere safety, they may desire either as truly as saints, although their desires are not virtuous. So far as their desires are merely natural, inseparable from their nature, and sincere, they are not morally wrong ; nor are they exhibited in the Scriptures as objects of the divine anger.

Accordingly, the prayer of the publican, who was, I think, plainly a sinner, was not regarded with mere anger by God, and was exactly such a prayer as I have mentioned ; a prayer for mere mercy and safety. ' He went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee,' because he had, in some important respects, a just sense of his character, and a sincere desire to be delivered from the dangers of it ; while the Pharisee had neither.

It is in the nature of things proper, that God, who saves no man for his merit, but communicates salvation merely from compassion, should save those who are sensible of their guilt, danger, and distress, rather than those who are utterly insensible, stupid, and careless. The former, in the natural sense, are qualified, and the latter are unqualified, to understand his mercy, the greatness of the love of Christ, and the wonderful work of sanctification ; and to feel the evils from which they are delivered, and the blessings to which they are introduced, beyond the grave. Accordingly, sanctification, as I have heretofore particularly observed, is communicated by God to sinners, only when they are convinced of their guilt and danger, and laboriously employed in asking for forgiveness ; and not to those who neither feel, nor strive, nor pray. If the prayers of convicted sinners were abominable, in the sense of the objector, could this fact exist ? Is not the steady course of Providence a complete refutation of the scheme ?

Finally ; It will be asked, *Do not sinners grow worse under convictions of conscience, and in the use of means ?*

To this question I answer, that I do not know ; neither do my objectors. I do not believe the publican was justified rather than the Pharisee, because he grew worse under his conviction. Individuals may grow worse ; and in one respect all certainly do, for they continue to sin so long as they are sinners ; and that, whether they are convinced or unconvinced.

Whether their characters and conduct are more guilty in any given instance, and during the periods immediately preceding, I am ignorant ; and shall remain so, until I can search the heart, and measure the degrees of depravity. As this is beyond the power of man, the whole inquiry is idle and vain.

Whenever sinners commit the same sins against greater light, they are more guilty than when they are committed against less light. But no man can determine whether this, or any thing like this, is the case with a sinner under conviction in a given instance ; unless perhaps sometimes the convinced person himself. I see no good reason why this question should ever be introduced into theological discourses. The only tendency of such introduction is to perplex and distress.

I have now, unless I am deceived, considered this objection in all its parts, and in all the forms in which it is customarily alleged. I shall now examine how far the objectors are consistent with themselves, in their other conduct towards sinners.

Many of these objectors have children, and educate them religiously, as well as prudently. These children, in many instances, they know to be sinners, so far as this character can be known in any case. Now all these parents advise, and exhort, and command their children to obey them, that is, in their external conduct ; to attend their family prayers, to be present at public worship, to learn and repeat prayers to God, and to be earnestly and

solemnly attentive to these religious duties. They teach them, in the same manner, to speak truth, to do justice, and to shew kindness to all with whom they are concerned. They require them also to labour, to preserve their property, to go regularly to school, to perform errands, and to do many other services. In a word, by the whole weight of their own authority, and that of the Scriptures, they require them to do every useful and desirable act, and to imbibe every useful and desirable habit.

Now it is to be remembered, that these children are sinners, and are known to be sinners. Of course, whatever conduct they adopt, they will commit sin. Of course also, whatever conduct they are advised to adopt, they will, according to the general principle in which the objection is founded, be advised to commit sin. They will as probably, or as certainly, commit sin in executing the commands of their parents, attending public or family worship, going to school, or performing an errand, as other sinners do in praying, or performing any other act, not in itself sinful.

How then can these parents, particularly such of them as are skilled in this controversy, advise their sinful children to pursue these kinds of conduct? Nay, more: how can they exhort and command them, reward them for obeying, and punish them for disobeying? The bare advice or exhortation given to other sinners, and prompting them to pray and strive that they may be saved, is, in the view of these parents, unlawful, and they refuse to give it. But to their own sinful children they not only give advice of the same unlawful nature; but add to it their exhortations and commands, their rewards and punishments.

Suppose the child of such a parent should refuse to obey such a command, or any other because he was, and because his parent knew he was, a sinner, and could not therefore lawfully do the thing commanded, nor his parent lawfully command him to do it; what could the parent answer, consistently I mean with his own principles? Plainly, he could not reprove

the child for his refusal; nor afterward advise, exhort, nor command him to do any thing, until after the child should have hopefully become a Christian.

But in this case what would become of children, and ultimately of the world? If children were not advised, what useful thing could they know? If they were not exhorted and commanded, what useful thing would they do; what useful habit would they establish, or even imbibe? Without such habits, what valuable end of their being could they answer? They would evidently become mere beasts of prey, and make the world a den of violence and slaughter.

In the same manner, and on the same principles, no person intrusted with the government or instruction of mankind, can advise, exhort, or command them, while sinners, to do any thing, except to repent and believe. Civil rulers and instructors are daily called upon by their offices to advise, or otherwise direct, such as are plainly sinners. Every law and regulation of a state, or seminary of science, is possessed of this nature; and is a greater transgression on the part of the lawgiver or ruler, than advice can be; because it contains a stronger expression of his will, and a more powerful inducement to the conduct which is prescribed. When parents therefore, or others, advise, they are according to the objection, guilty. When they exhort or command, they are more guilty. When they reward, or punish, they are most guilty.

As civil rulers and instructors are obliged, equally with ministers, to do what is right, and avoid what is wrong; they can no more be justified than ministers in advising, exhorting, or commanding sinners to do any thing which is unlawful. Hence, unless their subjects or pupils should first repent and believe, they cannot require them to do any thing, antecedently to their repentance. The world, of course, must be uninstructed and ungoverned until the millenium: and, what is still more to be lamented, the millenium itself, according to the usual course of God's providence, will never arrive.

Among the regulations which exist in all literary institutions, one, ever esteemed of high importance, is the establishment of *public prayers*. At these, students universally have hitherto been required to be present. But, on the scheme which I oppose, this requisition is altogether unlawful. In every institution, there is conclusive reason to believe that the great body of the members are impenitent. None of these therefore can, according to this scheme, be lawfully required to attend this worship, nor the public worship of the sabbath. But what would become of a literary institution, if this attendance were not required? What would these very parents say, if it were to be dispensed with in the case of their own children?

A Christian is the master of a family; but, as is sometimes the fact, is obviously the only Christian in the family. According to this scheme, it is plain, he cannot set up family worship; because he can neither require nor advise the members of his household to be present at this religious service.

Ministers, usually at least, preach more or less to sinners; and customarily endeavour to suit their sermons to the circumstances of impenitent men. But they can never lawfully advise sinners to be present, that they may hear them preach. Nor can a parent be justified in directing his children to be present or to stand up to worship, or to listen, that they may learn and perform their duty; for in all these things they are still sinners, and will commit sin. Nor can a minister advise his sinful parishioners to support him, or to build or repair a church; or to do the external acts of charity, justice, or truth; or to arm in defence of his country; or to obey its laws, and magistrates. In all these things, when done antecedently to regeneration, they are as really sinful, as in praying and in striving for salvation.

The very persons who rely most upon this objection, rejoice universally when mankind are in any place awakened to solemn consideration concerning their guilt and danger. But every awakened sinner prays;

and no person can by any ordinary means prevent him from praying. Why do these men rejoice? Certainly not in the sin which the persons awakened are supposed to commit. Certainly not in the abominable character which these prayers have in the sight of God. In what then do they rejoice? Undoubtedly in the prospect of the sinner's sanctification, and return to God. Of course there is such a prospect. In this angels would also rejoice.

3. *It is objected, that advising sinners to pray will encourage them to sloth, and quiet them in sin.*

That this consequence may follow, I shall not deny. But it will follow only from an abuse of the doctrine which is here taught. A bad man may pervert a good doctrine to bad purposes; but this is no objection against the doctrine itself. These very consequences have, I verily believe, flowed from the doctrine of my objectors in ten instances, where in one they have flowed from that which I am supporting.

It is the duty of all men immediately to repent of their sins, and turn to God, with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These things I would always preach; and wish my hearers always to believe and feel. For this end I would exhort them to be present, that they might hear and feel them. For this end I would exhort parents to teach them to their children in the morning of life, that they may know and feel them from the beginning. Nor am I less desirous that they should read the Scriptures, that they may find and feel the same things in *them*, as uttered by the mouth of God; that my own errors may in their minds be corrected, and the truths which I preach enforced, by that holy book. For the same reasons I wish them to mark the lives, and enjoy the conversation of Christians; that they may be enlightened by their views, and deeply affected by the excellency of religion, manifested in their conduct. The religious writings of others I recommend for the same important purposes. I preach and write in hope of doing some real good to mankind. That others, with the same design, possess more ability to accomplish

this interesting purpose, I cannot entertain a doubt. The same reasons therefore which make me wish that the congregation allotted to me may be present to hear my discourses, must with enhanced force render me desirous that they should also read the writings of others.

Finally: Whatever is thus taught, enforced, and gained, I urge them to make by solemn meditation a part of their own habitual course of thought; compare with their own moral condition; and bring home to their hearts, by asking God to sanctify them, and to bless the means of knowledge and amendment which he has been pleased to put into their hands.

In all this I see no natural cause of *sloth*, or *quiet in sin*. On the contrary, there is here, if I mistake not, more done to awaken, engage, and encourage men to seek salvation, than on the scheme of the objector. When I remember, that divines of the first reputation and the greatest success have thus preached, and that in the use of these very means, the great body of mankind, who appear to have been, or to be now, Christians, have become Christians, I feel assured that this is the proper manner of persuading others to assume the same character, and placing them in the way to a blessing from God.

SERMON CXXXVIII.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE

HEARING THE WORD OF GOD.

Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.—LUKE viii. 18.

IN the last Discourse but one I distributed the principal means of grace under the following heads:—

I. *The preaching of the gospel;*

II. *The reading of the Scriptures,*

III. *Prayer;*

IV. *Correspondence with religious men ;*

V. *Religious meditation ; particularly self-examination ; and,*

VI. *The religious education of children.*

In that Discourse also I endeavoured to exhibit the influence of these means in the work of salvation.

The next object which I propose is a *separate consideration of these several subjects ;* that their respective efficacy may be more particularly displayed. It will be remembered, that they are all here to be considered as means, in the application of which, holiness is *originally communicated*, as well as means of *improving* in holiness.

The direction in the text is, I apprehend, a direction given to all men who are in possession of the gospel. It is delivered in the most general terms ; and may therefore be regarded as extending to every mode of hearing which is useful. There are modes of hearing which, unless I am deceived, are *eventually* useful to sinners ; and in which the gospel becomes to sinners ‘the power of God unto salvation.’ I shall consider these modes as included in it ; modes in which I should wish a sinful child of my own, and for the same reason should wish others also, to hear the gospel. Such as have heard in these modes have in great multitudes, as I verily believe, been profited in a degree which no man can estimate.

The persons who in this sense would ‘take heed how they hear’ the gospel (by which I intend the Scriptures at large), ought, while they hear, to remember the following things :—

1. *That the gospel is the word of God.*

To prevent any misapprehension, I wish it to be kept steadily in view, that no attention or reverence is here claimed to preaching, any farther than the gospel is preached. To the mere opinions and declarations of a preacher, as such, no other respect is due, than that which by common consent is rendered to the opinions and declaration of all men, of similar understanding and worth. *The best opinions of men are rarely useful, wholesome advice. The Scrip-*

tures are a law : possessed of divine authority and obligation. So far as the doctrines, precepts, and ordinances of the Scriptures are preached, they claim the reverence which they themselves have challenged.

The solemn remembrance, that the Scriptures are the word of God, involves a variety of interesting considerations.

In this character, particularly, they come home to us as *the word of him, by whom we were created, and by whom we are preserved, and governed.* From this great and glorious Being all that we have, and all that we hope for, is, and must be, derived. We are his property ; and are rightfully disposed of, and rightfully required to dispose of ourselves, according to his pleasure. In the Scriptures alone is this pleasure made known to us. In them alone, therefore, we learn the proper destination of our faculties, our services, and ourselves. The law, by which we are here required to do his pleasure, is invested with all possible authority and obligation ; and demands our reverence and obedience in a manner supremely impressive.

As the word of God also the Scriptures are dictated by his wisdom, goodness, and truth. They are the word of Him who cannot mistake, deceive, nor injure. Consequently they contain ‘ all things necessary for life and godliness ;’ whatever we need to know, and whatever we ought to do, for the attainment of his approbation. On their entire wisdom and integrity, their fitness to promote the great purpose for which they were written, and their conduciveness to it in ourselves, we are wholly to rely. Not a doubt can be reasonably entertained concerning the truth of the doctrines, the soundness of the precepts, or the sincerity of the promises. Nor are we any more to distrust the certainty of the threatenings, or the reality of those awful dangers which they disclose. We are bound, on the one hand, not to question the truth, and on the other not to dispute the wisdom and goodness of that which is revealed. All things which this sacred book contains, are to be received

as they are. Our own opinions are implicitly to bow before them; and we are ever to be ready to believe that what we think 'the foolishness of God, is wiser than men,' than all the substituted opinions of ourselves or others. 'Let God be true,' ought to be our invariable language; 'but every man,' who opposes his declarations, 'a liar.'

Against this great and awful Being we have rebelled. Hence, although he is our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, he still regards our moral character with abhorrence. *The Scriptures therefore are published to us as the word of an offended God.* Hence are derived all those denunciations of anger and punishment found in them, which could have no place in the will of God, as revealed to obedient creatures.

As the word of God, the Scriptures announce to us, that, notwithstanding our rebellion, he is willing to be reconciled to us. We are therefore ever to remember, that they are the word of the Father, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier of mankind. In these venerable and amiable characters, God appears to us with infinite tenderness and endearment. His word is thus presented to us as the pleasure of the best of all friends, and the most affectionate of all parents. In our ruined condition he beheld us with boundless mercy; and, unasked and undesired, undertook to rescue us from destruction. For this end, the Saviour came into the world, lived a life of humiliation, and died a death of anguish and infamy. For this end, the Spirit of truth came into the world to convince, renew, and purify the hearts of mankind. *Of these three Persons in the one Jehovah, the Scriptures are the word; willed by the Father, dictated by the Son, and inspired by the Holy Ghost.*

As the word of God, the Scriptures are the word of him on whom we daily depend for life, and breath, and all things. Whatever we enjoy he gives; whatever we hope for must, if enjoyed at all, be also given by him. Without him, we are 'poor, and miserable, and in want of all things.' With his favour, we shall

be 'rich' indeed, 'and have need of nothing.'

The Scriptures are also the word of him by whom we shall be judged, and rewarded. The day is hastening, when we shall be called to an account for all our conduct, and shall be compelled to rehearse it before him. If we have done well, if we have obeyed, worshipped, and glorified him, and 'served our generation according to his will,' we shall be acquitted in this great trial, and received to everlasting glory. If we have done evil, and refused to do good, we shall be driven away to final and irremediable perdition.

Whenever we are assembled to hear the gospel, we are to remember, that with reference to all these solemn things it is the word of God.

2. *That we are sinners, who infinitely need forgiveness and salvation.*

As sinners, we are irreversibly condemned by that divine law, which we have broken, and by that just government, against which we have rebelled. 'The soul that sinneth shall die,' was the original sentence of that law to mankind; the sentence of him who can neither deceive nor change. The sentence will therefore be executed in its strictest meaning on all who disobey, and who do not become interested in the redemption of Christ. Under such a sentence infinitely dreadful, and unalterably certain, our danger is immensely great, and our ruin entire. From this sentence therefore we infinitely need a deliverance. Our all is at stake; and our souls are in a situation of the most terrible hazard. 'Hell,' if we continue in this situation, 'is open before us, and destruction hath no covering.'

It is impossible that any beings should be in a state of more absolute and pressing necessity. Rational, immortal, and incapable of perishing by annihilation, we must be, and be for ever. But to exist for ever, and yet to be sinful and miserable only, is a doom, compared with which, all other characters and sufferings lose their deformity and wretchedness, and rise into happiness and distinction. When

we are present in the house of God, we should recall with deep affection this intense and melancholy necessity, and feel the declarations of Scripture with a concern, suited to the inestimable importance of our situation.

3. *That the Scriptures are the book in which alone the terms and means of salvation are published.*

The word *gospel*, as you know, signifies *good tidings*, or *joyful news*. This name is given to the Scriptures generally, and to the New Testament particularly, because they contain the best of all tidings ever published to this ruined world. Independently of the gospel, all the race of Adam are under a sentence of condemnation, without a friend, and without a hope. To these forlorn and miserable beings the infinitely merciful God has been pleased to make known a way of escape, a deliverance from destruction. This glorious communication is made to mankind in the Scriptures only. From no other source has man ever learned that God is reconcilable on any terms, that sinners can be forgiven; that there is in the universe an atonement for sin; or that any atonement will be accepted. From no other source have we been informed, that God will be pleased with any worship which we can render; or, if he will, what that worship is. Without the Scriptures, we know not that the connexion between God and man, between heaven and earth, can be renewed; or that the gates, which admit intelligent beings to the world of enjoyment, have been, or ever will be, opened to apostate creatures.

To beings, in circumstances of such necessity and danger, tidings even of partial deliverance must be delightful. But these are tidings of complete deliverance from sin, and of an entire escape from misery. To beings, left in absolute ignorance of reconciliation to God, and in absolute despair of future enjoyment; to whom the world of happiness was shut, and to whom the ages of eternity rolled onward no bright reversion; even the uncertain rumour of relief must, one would imagine, echo through-

out every region of the globe which they inhabited, and thrill with inexpressible emotions in every heart. But these are *certain* tidings from God himself concerning this glorious possession; from the God who cannot deceive; the God whose promises endure for ever.

This great salvation is, however, proffered by God on his own terms only. In the same Scriptures are these terms found. From them alone can we learn on what conditions we may obtain life, and escape from death. 'The way of holiness,' to which the gospel alone directs us, 'is' there made 'a highway;' and 'wayfaring men, though fools,' need not 'err therein.'

In the Scriptures also are the means of this divine and immortal attainment presented to our view. Here we are taught, that we become possessed of a title to everlasting life by faith, repentance, and holiness. Here also is pointed out the way in which these indispensable characteristics are communicated; *vis.* the means of grace already mentioned in these Discourses. Both the means and the terms are eminently reasonable and desirable; in themselves real and superior good, and the way to greater good; easy of adoption and use, and, with the divine blessing, efficacious to the end for which they are used; sanctioned with supreme authority by the testimony of God, and daily confirmed by their actual influence on multitudes of mankind.

When, therefore, we hear the word of God, we are ever to remember, that we are taught things in this respect infinitely interesting to us, and incapable of being derived from any other source.

4. *That in order to be saved, we must understand the means, and the terms, of salvation.*

There is no other word of God but the Scriptures; and, beside God, there is no other being, who can inform us 'what we must do to be saved.' Philosophers may investigate and write from generation to generation; this vast momentous subject has ever lain and will for ever lie, beyond their reach. Those

who read and understood the instructions of the ancient philosophers were never reformed by their doctrines. Those who read and understand the moral system of infidel philosophers, are never amended by them, but corrupted of course. The Scriptures, on the contrary, have been the means of renewing and reforming millions of the human race. But this sacred book was never of the least use to any man, by whom it was not in some good measure understood. To enable mankind at large to understand it, God instituted the evangelical ministry. All complicated objects of the intellect, are far better known by sober reflection and diligent research, than they can be by casual or cursory thinking. The Scriptures contain a system immensely complicated. They demand therefore the most patient, persevering study, and thorough investigation. Hence, ministers, consecrated originally to this employment, are commanded to 'give themselves wholly to the ministry;' particularly to *reading*, and to *meditation*, that they may not be novices, nor furnish reasons to others for regarding their discourses with contempt. But all their labours will be to no purpose, unless those who hear them understand their discourses, however evangelically and usefully they may be written. Every hearer, therefore, should solemnly call to mind in the house of God, that the means and terms of eternal life then are published to him, that they are found nowhere but in the Scriptures; and that the Scriptures can be of no benefit to him, unless he understands them. His highest interest and indispensable duty demand of him, therefore, that he should hear as for his life.

It ought to be added, that all these things are not only explained in the Scriptures, but enforced on the heart with supreme power and efficacy. Motives of amazing import are here presented, to persuade the sinner to repentance. Alarms compel, invitations allure, threatenings terrify, and promises encourage, of such a nature, and exhibited in such a manner, as boundless wisdom and goodness thought

best fitted to affect the heart. But all these also are in vain, unless heard, understood, and realized, by the sinner.

5. *We are further to remember, that our opportunities of hearing the word of God are few; and that which we are enjoying is, not improbably, the best which will ever arrive.*

‘Our life’ itself is but a ‘vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.’ Of this life the opportunities of hearing the gospel compose only a little part. The sabbath is almost the only season allotted to this end; a seventh part merely of our time; and, as actually enjoyed by us, a much less proportion. By the weakness of childhood, the thoughtlessness of youth, and the hindrances of riper years, the number of sabbaths which we are able to employ in gaining salvation is greatly reduced. If those which we lose in this manner by negligence, and by devotion to the world, be taken from the whole number, we shall find those which remain fewer by far than we are usually aware: few in themselves, few especially for so great and important a work.

How many sabbaths remain to us at any time, we can in no degree conjecture. That the number must be small, and that it may be still smaller, we know; but whether the present sabbath be not the last, we can never know. Were we assured, that it was the last, with what anxiety, care, and diligence should we devote it to the attainment of endless life! As it may be the last, it ought to be regarded with the same anxiety. Whether it be, or be not the last, it is unquestionably the best opportunity that we shall enjoy.

It is in our possession: all others are merely expected. It is the sabbath on which we are less hardened and less guilty than we shall ever be at any future period. God is now reconcilable. Before another sabbath arrives, he may cast us off. His own command is, ‘To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts.’ ‘Behold now,’ says St. Paul,

'is the accepted time! Behold, now is the day of salvation!' Whenever, therefore, we are assembled to hear the word of God upon the sabbath, we should solemnly feel that we possess the best opportunity of obtaining everlasting life which we shall ever enjoy.

6. *We are also to remember, that the Scriptures are the word by which we shall be finally judged.*

'Whose soever sins ye remit,' saith our Saviour to his apostles, 'they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.' In other words, 'I commission you to publish the terms of life and death to mankind. He whose life shall be condemned by the terms which, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, I will enable you to announce, shall be condemned by me in the judgment. On the contrary, him whose life shall be approved by these terms, I will approve at the final day.' All these terms of remitting and retaining sin, as published by the apostles, we now have in the gospel; and they are continually preached in the house of God. How infinitely important is it, that they should be infixed in our understanding, our memory, and our hearts; that we may always know, remember, and feel them, that they may be the source and the guide of all our conduct; and that by them we may in the end, not only be judged, but justified also, and rewarded!

Let every person, then, who is present at the preaching of the gospel, call to mind, that he is hearing the very terms of his final acquittal, or condemnation. Let him also remember, that one of the grounds of that sentence, which he will receive from the Judge of the quick and the dead, will be, that he is then 'taking heed how he hears;' or that he is refusing or neglecting to perform this solemn duty.

7. *We are to remember, that God is present, to observe the manner in which we hear.*

This consideration is of infinite moment; and ought with supreme force to come home to every

heart. Let me beseech every member of this assembly to think, how great and awful a being God is. Remember how absolutely you are indebted to him for 'life, and breath, and all things' which you have enjoyed; and how entirely you depend upon him for every thing which you hope to enjoy, either in this world, or that which is to come. Remember how grossly you have sinned against him, by violating his holy law; and how mercifully he has invited you to repent, and return to your obedience. Think how aggravating will be the guilt of refusing to return, when thus invited, how entirely you are in his hands, and how impossible it is that you should escape from his power.

Realize, that his eye, as a flame of fire, pervades and enlightens all the secret retreats of the workers of iniquity; and that he sees and records every wandering, stupid, worldly, and disobedient thought. Remember, that he will require you to rehearse before him the manner in which you hear his word this day.

How immensely interesting are these considerations to every person in this assembly! Who, in a full and realizing, who, even in the most imperfect and casual, view of them, can fail, with supreme solicitude, to 'take heed how he hears?'

8. *As all things contained in the Scriptures are wise, and right, and good; so we are to remember, that they are worthy of all acceptation.*

My audience may remember, that I originally proposed to consider the manner in which sinners may hear the gospel, with rational hopes of being benefited by it. The hearing of the gospel I exhibited as one of the means of grace; and mentioned, that I should discuss it as such, and not as a theme of general investigation. To this view of the subject I have therefore confined myself; and have purposely omitted many observations which might be usefully made concerning this subject, to persons who are already *Christians*. Almost all the observations which I have made, are indeed, in their full

force, applicable to them also. To sinners they are all applicable; and are all, in every sense, in their power, while they continue sinners. The *last* is as truly of this nature, as those which preceded it.

Every sinner may, antecedently to his regeneration, entertain a full conviction that the Scriptures are worthy of all acceptation. With this conviction solemnly impressed on the mind, every sinner may hear the gospel. Every sinner may also feel this truth in a strong and affecting manner. Awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, he does thus actually feel, antecedently to any essential change in his moral character. But *what some sinners do feel, all others may feel.* But under this conviction, and this sense, all those are sanctified, who are sanctified at all. With these very views of divine truth upon their minds, the Spirit of God communicates to them, I do not mean to every one who is in this situation; for this I am not warranted to say, nor to believe; but to most of them, perhaps to all who do not voluntarily relinquish their convictions; that change of heart, which is commonly styled regeneration; a change, infinitely important to every child of Adam.

‘Faith,’ says St. Paul, ‘cometh by hearing.’ I have endeavoured to describe the manner of hearing in which it comes. It is to be still carefully remembered, that unless faith is actually obtained and exercised, no mode of hearing whatever will ultimately be of any value. The mode which I have pointed out is, in my apprehension, inestimably valuable, as means eminently useful to this great end.

What is true of *hearing* the gospel, is substantially true of *reading* it; and of reading also other religious books. The Scriptures particularly, and other religious books generally, are to be read with great care, and with all the views which I have expressed; that we may be able to judge whether those who preach to us, preach the truth of God. They are to be read also, that we may keep alive, and in full force, the impressions communicated by preaching

Finally, they are to be read, that we may gain the full advantages of all our opportunities between the returns of the sabbath; and furnish ourselves with daily instruction, with reproofs for our daily sins, with encouragement to our daily duties, and with powerful motives to a daily progress in the divine life.

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations it is evident, that those who do not hear in the manner which has been described, are, even according to their own principles, wholly inexcusable.*

All persons, present at the preaching of the gospel, can, if they please, solemnly remember that it is the word of God—that they are sinners, who infinitely need salvation—that in the gospel only the terms and means of salvation are published to mankind—that these, in order to be of any use to them, must be understood by themselves—that their opportunities of hearing it are few—and that the present is the best, and may be the last, which they will ever enjoy—that the Scriptures contain all the rules of life, by which they will be judged—that God is an eye-witness of the manner in which they hear—and that the gospel is worthy of all acceptation, and ought, therefore, to be received with the heart, as well as with the understanding. To hear in this manner demands no especial communication from God; and he who does not thus hear, is stripped of the pretence even of self-justification. It is indeed equally the duty of every man to hear with evangelical faith. But as this faith is the gift of God, unrenewed men are ever prone to feel themselves, in some degree, excusable in neglecting to hear with this exercise of the heart. This apprehension is, I acknowledge, entirely without foundation. Still it exists. But in the present case, on their own ground, no plea can be offered, which will even satisfy themselves. Let them therefore, when guilty of this negligence, ‘lay their hands upon their mouths, and their mouths in the dust, and confess their guilt before God.

Of this miserable class of sinners not a small num

ber are, sabbath by sabbath, seen in this house. Almost all who assemble here are in the morning of life; when, if ever, the heart is tender, and easily susceptible of divine impressions from the word of God. Almost all enjoy also the peculiar blessings of a liberal and religious education, and the best opportunities of knowing their duty, and their danger. Still, in defiance of the solemn commands of religion, and the authority of God, as well as of common decency, there are those who quietly lay their heads down to sleep when the prayer is ended, or the psalm read. These persons are indeed present in the house of God; but they are present only to insult him, to cast contempt upon the cross of Christ, and to grieve in the most shameful manner the Spirit of grace. They can hardly be said to hear at all. They come into the presence of God, merely to declare to him, and to all who are present, that they will not hear nor obey his voice; and to 'treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the judgment.' Let them remember, that the God who made them, and in whose hands their breath is, is here; and that his all-searching eye is fixed with an intense and dreadful survey upon their conduct, and upon their hearts. Let them remember, that he hath said, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and ye have not regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind. Then shall ye call, but I will not answer. Ye shall seek me early, and shall not find me: because ye hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.'

Let those also, who with more decency, and more momentary wisdom, really hear, and yet with the slightest temptations forget what they hear—vessels, into which the water of life is poured, only to be poured out again—remember, that they hear to no valuable end. The true end of this privilege is 're-

penitance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.' This end they prevent in themselves, by an absolute destitution of serious and deep concern for their salvation. In their final ruin they will find little comfort in remembering this frail, feeble attention to the word of God. It will be a melancholy support in that terrible day, to say to their Judge 'We have eaten and drank in thy presence; and thou hast taught in our streets:' when they hear him reply, 'Depart from me, for I know you not, ye workers of iniquity!'

2. *How infinitely desirable is it, that we should hear with good and honest hearts!*

This, and this only, is obeying, in the proper sense the command of our Saviour. As the gospel is plainly 'worthy of all acceptation,' to accept it in this manner is the indispensable duty of every man to whom it is preached. To this end we should remember, that our all is depending; our virtue, usefulness, and peace in the present life; our hope and support in death; our acquittal in the judgment; our escape from final perdition; and our introduction to eternal glory in the kingdom of our heavenly Father. What dreadful emotions must every careless, stupid sinner experience on a death-bed, when he calls to mind, that he squandered, with infinite prodigality, all his opportunities of gaining salvation, and cast away the blessings of comfort and hope for ever! Amid the solemn scenes of such a bed, when life is trembling and fluttering over the abyss of destruction; the pulse forgetting to beat, the soul struggling, and clinging to its tenement of clay, with awful anticipations of the judgment; how overwhelming must it be to remember, that every prayer and sermon, that the gospel itself, and all the blessings which it contains, although so frequently offered by God with infinite kindness, were only despised, neglected, and forgotten! But the lamp is now gone out, the oil expended, and the door shut. Nothing, therefore, remains to the infatuated votary of sense and sin, but 'the blackness of darkness for ever!'

SERMON CXXXIX.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE NATURE, SEASONS, AND OBLIGATIONS OF
PRAYER.

Pray without ceasing.—1 THESS. v. 17.

THE preceding Discourse was occupied by considerations on the two first of those means of grace which were formerly mentioned; viz. the preaching and hearing of the gospel, and the reading of the Scriptures, and other religious books. I shall now proceed to the examination of the third of those means; viz. prayer.

In this examination I shall depart from the scheme which was pursued in the preceding Discourse, and shall consider the subject generally under the following heads:—

- I. *The nature, and,*
- II. *The seasons of prayer.*
- III. *The obligations to pray.*
- IV. *The usefulness of prayer.*
- V. *The encouragements to it.*
- VI. *The objections usually made against it.*

I. *I shall briefly consider the nature of prayer.*

Prayer, according to the language of the Westminster Catechism, ‘is the offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and a thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.’ This definition is undoubtedly just; yet it is in a degree defective. Prayer is an act of worship, consisting of four great parts; *adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving*.

The first of these, *adoration*, consists in solemnly reciting the character of God; and in reverentially ascribing to him the glory due to his name for the

infinite perfections which he possesses, and for all the manifestations which he has made of himself in his word, and in his works.

The second, *confession*, demands no comment.

The third, *petition*, is both by reason and revelation confined to 'things which are agreeable to the will' of God. His will involves whatever is right and good; and nothing which is not agreeable to it is in reality desirable.

Thanksgiving, the last of these subjects, is so generally and so well understood, as to need no explanation at the present time.

All these are to be offered up to God 'in the name of Christ,' in obedience to his express command. Unless they are so offered, they cannot, under the Christian dispensation, be accepted.

II. *The principal seasons of prayer are the following:—*

1. *The sabbath.*

On this holy day we are required to devote ourselves to this duty in a peculiar manner. A prime part of the religious service to which it is destined consists of prayer. For this reason the sanctuary is appropriately styled the 'house of prayer.' Thus God says in Isaiah, 'I will make them joyful in my house of prayer;' and again, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.' These promises immediately respect Christian nations; and teach in the clearest manner the proper destination of the house of God, and of the day upon which especially it is occupied by religious assemblies. The Jewish church worshipped in this manner on *their sabbath*; and the primitive Christian church on the *Lord's day*. These examples have been followed in every age of Christianity by those who in any country have worn the Christian name.

Nor is the sabbath a season of *public* prayer only; it is equally to be employed in *private* prayer. On this sacred day, God has required a peculiar attention to all our religious duties; at home, as well as in the sanctuary. Every advantage for this purpose is furnished by this heavenly season. The consecra-

tion of this holy day by the fourth command, by his own resting upon the first sabbath, and by the resurrection of the Redeemer; the celebration of it by the church in all the ages of time; the blessing originally annexed to it; and the sanctification acquired, and increased, in the minds of many millions of the human race, all unite to designate it as being pre-eminently the season of prayer. With these affecting views of the sabbath, all others conspire. On this day mankind assemble in the house of God as brethren, and as children of the same divine Parent, to worship their Creator, to learn his holy will, and to obtain a title to endless life. Here, with one united voice, they confess their sins before him. Hither they come, to acknowledge their dependance on him for the communication of every blessing, and the fulfilment of every hope. Here they stand as mere suppliants for mercy; for the forgiveness of their sins, and the renovation of their souls. Hither they come, to be employed only in religious thoughts, affections, and pursuits; to act as spiritual and immortal beings; and to appear as candidates for everlasting life. Here, the word of God is presented to them as a law, immutable and eternal, which they have violated, and by which they are condemned; as the news and means of restoration to safety, hope, and life; as the manifestation of his character, and our own; and as the tidings of a future resurrection, judgment, and immortality. Hither they come, on this sacred day, into the immediate presence of God, as the reconcilable Father of mankind; infinitely great, venerable, and lovely in his character. Here they behold the Saviour in all his peculiar glory and beauty, his transcendent compassion and self-denial. His condescension and humiliation, his preaching and miracles, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and exaltation, are here presented in his word and ordinances, and pencilled by the hand of Jehovah.

This holy season is the day appointed by God himself, as a perpetual festival, for the commemora-

tion of these glorious things; especially of the creation and redemption of mankind, and of the divine perfections manifested in these wonderful works. As such a festival it is regarded and acknowledged by all who assemble for his worship.

To all these things the strong power of sympathy lends an interest, a solemnity, a capacity for affecting the soul, unrivalled in its nature, and attainable in no other situation.

As on the sabbath these things are eminently felt in the house of God, so the spirit imbibed here is extended to every thing of the same nature, when contemplated in our own dwellings. Thither we carry the feelings originated in the sanctuary, and there we prolong the views which the sabbath has already inspired. In both places, therefore, we are furnished with advantages for praying fervently and acceptably at this happy season, which obviously make the sabbath by way of distinction the day of prayer.

2. *Such occasional days as are warranted by the word of God, and appointed by the rulers of mankind, for public worship, are also important seasons of prayer.*

Public annual festivals for national thanksgiving, and public days of national humiliation and prayer, were enjoined by God upon the Israelites; the only nation to whom, as such, he ever gave laws and institutions. The institutions and laws of Moses are binding on us no farther than as they are applicable to our circumstances. Political and ceremonial branches of this system are not, and cannot be, applicable to the state of any modern, or Christian, nation. They are therefore abrogated, as we are amply assured in the Scriptures themselves. But these national thanksgivings and fasts are no less applicable to the state of all nations than to that of the Israelites. For all nations equally with them have sins to be confessed and lamented, and blessings to be remembered and acknowledged. God also has been pleased to regard, in a favourable and merciful manner, public fasts, not directly appointed by himself. Thus, when the Ninevites, alarmed by the

prediction of Jonah, kept a day of solemn humiliation and fasting for their sins, God 'repented of the evil, that he said he would do unto them;' and he did it not. In consequence of the fast also of the Jews in Shushan, on account of the ruin threatened to their nation by the malicious fraud of Haman, God accomplished their deliverance in a manner equally wonderful and glorious. Important blessings seem also to have been given in consequence of the fasts proclaimed severally by Ezra and Nehemiah. The public services of these days are usually the same with those of the sabbath. Prayer, particularly, is a prime part of them all. On such days the ancient churches assembled to acknowledge the goodness of God to them, and to confess and lament their sins against him. In these religious solemnities they have been followed extensively by the church in later times.

3. *The morning and evening of every day are, in a peculiar manner, seasons of prayer.*

This truth was taught directly by the morning and evening sacrifice, under the Mosaic dispensation. Aaron, and the succeeding high-priests, were commanded, Exod. xxx. 7, 'to burn incense on the altar of incense every morning.' See also Exod. xxxvi. 3; Exod. xii. Levit. vi. 12. In like manner the evening sacrifice and oblation are often mentioned; as in 1 Kings xviii. 29; 2 Kings xvi. 15; Ezra ix. 4; and Dan. ix. 21.

In conformity to the language of this institution, David declares that he steadily performed this religious duty every morning and every evening, and also at noon every day. Daniel prayed to his God 'three times a day.' Job also offered sacrifice in the morning. In the same manner, unquestionably, worshipped all the pious men of ancient times.

With the Scriptures, the nature of the case perfectly accords. In the morning we are solemnly called upon to remember the protection which God has extended to us through the night; a season in which we were wholly unable to protect ourselves.

We are required to recollect also, that he has graciously given us the blessing of sleep, and the peace and safety with which we have rested upon our beds. He who does not praise God for these indispensable gifts, must be alike ungrateful and stupid.

In the morning also we are about to enter upon the business of the day, and stand therefore in absolute need of the divine protection, favour, and blessing. How wretched should we be, and how useless, unless our food and raiment, our health and strength, our reason, and all our other useful faculties, were continued in our possession? Equally do we need security against temptation and sin, danger and harm. But for all these we are entirely dependant on God alone.

In the evening we are solemnly obligated to remember with the deepest gratitude the blessings of the day. These are the blessings which we supplicated in the morning, and which God has been pleased to bestow upon us, notwithstanding our sins. In the evening also we are about to lay ourselves down to sleep. Beside him, we have no protector; and to him we must be indebted both for the sleep itself, and for the peace and safety without which it cannot be enjoyed.

Stated and regular seasons are indispensable to the effectual performance of all business. Method, proverbially styled 'the soul of business,' cannot exist without such seasons. Irregularity, which is the prevention or the ruin of all valuable efforts, grows of course out of irregular distributions of time. That which is done at accidental seasons only, is ultimately not done at all. No business demands regularity and method more than prayer. There is in all men naturally a strong indisposition to pray. Stated seasons therefore, returning at regular periods, are peculiarly necessary to preserve this duty in its full vigour. He who prays at such seasons will always remember this duty; will form his schemes of life so, as to provide the proper places for performing it; will be reproached by his con-

science for neglecting it ; will keep alive the spirit of prayer from one season to another, so as to render the practice delightful ; and will be preserved, uninterruptedly, in the practice, by the strong influence of habit. He who prays at accidental seasons only, will first neglect, then hate, and finally desist from this duty.

The morning and evening are seasons peculiarly fitted for the regular returns of prayer. They occur at intervals, perfectly convenient ; terminate, successively, our sleep and our labour ; are seasons necessarily distinguished ; remind us regularly of all that for which we should pray ; and are effectual means of establishing in us immoveable habits of praying. They involve every thing therefore which can be either asked or wished for this interesting purpose.

As these are seasons eminently advantageous for secret prayer, so they are almost the only possible seasons for the united devotion of families. Then, and then only, are all the members customarily present. Then the family business is either not begun, or ended, and all are at leisure to employ themselves in the worship of God. Strangers then do not intrude, and in this manner prevent the performance of the duty. Every thing therefore concurs at these seasons to promote and establish the method, regularity, and habit which, necessary always, are indispensable where numbers are concerned.

4. *The times at which we receive our food are proper seasons of prayer.*

On food we depend for the continuance of life ; and, of course, for the enjoyment of all temporal good. On this blessing also depends in the like manner, the continuance of our probation : and therefore all our future, spiritual good, so far as it will be gained in the present world. With this good are inseparably connected also those immortal blessings, which God will communicate as its proper reward beyond the grave. Hence, the communication of this blessing demands of us peculiar attention, gra-

litude, and acknowledgments.

These, accordingly, the Scriptures require every where at our hands. 'Every creature of God,' say they, 'is good, if it be received with thanksgiving.' They inform us also, that it is 'sanctified by the word of God,' that is, his express permission to use it, 'and by prayer.' They farther teach us, that 'God created meats, to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. In these passages they teach us, that meats were created for this end, that they should be received by us with thanksgiving: and that, if they are not thus received, the end of their creation is not accomplished; that they are not good, when not thus received; and that they are not sanctified without prayer. The Scriptures also direct us, that 'whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God.' But when we receive our food, whatever emotions we may experience within, we cannot glorify God before our fellow-men, except by asking for his blessing upon it, and rendering to him our praise for the bounty by which it is daily supplied.

In conformity with these precepts, David often solemnly praises God for the communication of this blessing to himself, and calls upon mankind to unite in the praise. The primitive Christians are exhibited by St. Paul as 'eating, and giving God thanks;' or, in other words, as 'giving God thanks, when they received their food.' Our Saviour, the perfect example to all his followers, blessed the food provided for himself and those around him, to teach us, that it is our duty always to ask that blessing of God upon our own meals, without which they cannot be either useful or desirable enjoyments. The same glorious Person also gave thanks uniformly to God for the bounties of his providence, to shew us, that we are always to remember, with gratitude and praise, the divine goodness in supplying our wants, and in thus prolonging our lives. From this glorious example, and these most reasonable precepts, are

derived ample proofs of this important duty, and the most powerful motives to perform invariably, faithfully, and with sincere delight, so desirable a service.

The very heathen were so sensible of the propriety and obligation of this duty, as enjoined by the religion of nature, that to a great extent they steadily made libations to their gods before their meals, as an acknowledgment of their indebtedness to them for their daily food. He, therefore, who, in a Christian country, neglects to praise God for his own food, cannot with propriety be called a heathen. He may with more fitness be styled an animal. Nay, in some respects, he degrades himself below the brutes. For 'the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' but he 'doth not know, nor even consider.'

5. *Besides these regular seasons of prayer, there are many others continually occurring which can be designated by no general name.*

The times at which all peculiar blessings are bestowed on us, are times of prayer. Whenever we are successful in any important concern, and are especially prospered, supported, or comforted; whenever we, or ours, are delivered from trouble or want, pain or sickness; whenever we escape from peculiar temptations, are placed in safety, and furnished with strength, peace, hope, and joy, with the peculiar blessings of Christian fellowship, the rectification of our views, and the improvement of our religious affections, we are especially summoned to the duties of prayer and thanksgiving.

In the same manner is prayer our especial duty at those seasons in which we are peculiarly distressed in body or in mind, are in peculiar danger, are exposed peculiarly to temptations, are sick, are bereaved of beloved friends, are threatened with alarming evils, or whenever we find ourselves the subjects of peculiar sloth, reluctance to our duty, or ready to repine at the dispensations of God's providence, or to distrust his faithfulness, or his mercy.

Nor are we less obviously called to the duties of prayer and thanksgiving by the peculiar prosperity or distresses, the dangers or deliverances of our country. I speak not here of this duty as performed in public. I refer immediately to the performances of the closet. No man can safely or warrantably neglect the interests of his country in his secret devotions. As its interests ought ever to be near his heart, so they ought ever to be remembered, when he comes into the presence of God.

In the same manner the great concerns of the church of God, ought continually to be subjects of fervent supplication. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,' saith the psalmist, 'let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.' All the wants and woes, all the blessings and consolations, of the church of God should be felt, as the personal concerns of every Christian; and, as such, should ascend up in his daily devotions before the throne of his Maker. I only add, that both reason and revelation have made it our plain duty to pray for all men. At the times also when we ourselves commence any important business, journey, or other undertaking, which is of particular consequence to our well-being, we are required to begin our efforts with humble petitions for the guidance, protection, and blessing of God.

Retirement likewise, and solitude, the lonely walk, the chamber of meditation, and the peaceful pillow, being peculiarly friendly to this solemn enjoyment, summon us to it with peculiar motives.

Of these occasions generally, whether alluded to or specified, it is to be observed, that their return more or less every day run through life, and end only at death. All of them demand either silent or audible acknowledgments of our constant dependance on God, and our absolute indebtedness to him for all good. They demand a lively sense of his presence, perfection, and government, our supreme love and unchanging confidence to be exercised toward

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III. *I shall now briefly consider our obligations to perform this duty.*

1. *To pray to God is a natural dictate of the human mind; a dictate of conscience, and common sense.*

We are absolutely dependant on God for all good. To know this, is to know a truth of immense importance to the moral system at large, and to each individual of which this system is composed. To feel it with acquiescence and joy, is to conform in our feelings, to that state of things which is agreeable to the will of God, and of course to absolute rectitude. We are bound to delight in such a dependance on the glorious and perfect Jehovah; infinitely great, and wise, and good as he is; and able and disposed as he is to supply all our wants, and to furnish us with every real blessing.

But a spirit of dependance is more awakened, cherished, and preserved by prayer than by all things else. But to cherish and preserve it in our minds is the indispensable duty, and the supreme interest of man. Few things contribute in the same degree to render us excellent, amiable, or approved by God.

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best fitted to affect the heart. But all these also are in vain, unless heard, understood, and realized, by the sinner.

5. *We are farther to remember, that our opportunities of hearing the word of God are few; and that which we are enjoying is, not improbably, the best which will ever arrive.*

‘Our life’ itself is but a ‘vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.’ Of this life the opportunities of hearing the gospel compose only a little part. The sabbath is almost the only season allotted to this end; a seventh part merely of our time; and, as actually enjoyed by us, a much less proportion. By the weakness of childhood, the thoughtlessness of youth, and the hindrances of riper years, the number of sabbaths which we are able to employ in gaining salvation is greatly reduced. If those which we lose in this manner by negligence, and by devotion to the world, be taken from the whole number, we shall find those which remain fewer by far than we are usually aware: few in themselves, few especially for so great and important a work.

How many sabbaths remain to us at any time, we can in no degree conjecture. That the number must be small, and that it may be still smaller, we know; but whether the present sabbath be not the last, we can never know. Were we assured, that it was the last, with what anxiety, care, and diligence should we devote it to the attainment of endless life! As it may be the last, it ought to be regarded with the same anxiety. Whether it be, or be not the last, it is unquestionably the best opportunity that we shall enjoy.

It is in our possession: all others are merely expected. It is the sabbath on which we are less hardened and less guilty than we shall ever be at any future period. God is now reconcilable. Before another sabbath arrives, he may cast us off. His own command is, ‘To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts.’ ‘Behold now,’ says St. Paul,

'is the accepted time! Behold, now is the day of salvation!' Whenever, therefore, we are assembled to hear the word of God upon the sabbath, we should solemnly feel that we possess the best opportunity of obtaining everlasting life which we shall ever enjoy.

6. *We are also to remember, that the Scriptures are the word by which we shall be finally judged.*

'Whose soever sins ye remit,' saith our Saviour to his apostles, 'they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.' In other words, 'I commission you to publish the terms of life and death to mankind. He whose life shall be condemned by the terms which, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, I will enable you to announce, shall be condemned by me in the judgment. On the contrary, him whose life shall be approved by these terms, I will approve at the final day.' All these terms of remitting and retaining sin, as published by the apostles, we now have in the gospel; and they are continually preached in the house of God. How infinitely important is it, that they should be infixed in our understanding, our memory, and our hearts; that we may always know, remember, and feel them, that they may be the source and the guide of all our conduct; and that by them we may in the end, not only be judged, but justified also, and rewarded!

Let every person, then, who is present at the preaching of the gospel, call to mind, that he is hearing the very terms of his final acquittal, or condemnation. Let him also remember, that one of the grounds of that sentence, which he will receive from the Judge of the quick and the dead, will be, that he is then 'taking heed how he hears;' or that he is refusing or neglecting to perform this solemn duty.

7. *We are to remember, that God is present, to observe the manner in which we hear.*

This consideration is of infinite moment; and ought with supreme force to come home to every

heart. Let me beseech every member of this assembly to think, how great and awful a being God is. Remember how absolutely you are indebted to him for 'life, and breath, and all things' which you have enjoyed; and how entirely you depend upon him for every thing which you hope to enjoy, either in this world, or that which is to come. Remember how grossly you have sinned against him, by violating his holy law; and how mercifully he has invited you to repent, and return to your obedience. Think how aggravating will be the guilt of refusing to return, when thus invited, how entirely you are in his hands, and how impossible it is that you should escape from his power.

Realize, that his eye, as a flame of fire, pervades and enlightens all the secret retreats of the workers of iniquity; and that he sees and records every wandering, stupid, worldly, and disobedient thought. Remember, that he will require you to rehearse before him the manner in which you hear his word this day.

How immensely interesting are these considerations to every person in this assembly! Who, in a full and realizing, who, even in the most imperfect and casual, view of them, can fail, with supreme solicitude, to 'take heed how he hears?'

8. *As all things contained in the Scriptures are wise, and right, and good; so we are to remember, that they are worthy of all acceptation.*

My audience may remember, that I originally proposed to consider the manner in which sinners may hear the gospel, with rational hopes of being benefited by it. The hearing of the gospel I exhibited as one of the means of grace; and mentioned, that I should discuss it as such, and not as a theme of general investigation. To this view of the subject I have therefore confined myself; and have purposely omitted many observations which might be usefully made concerning this subject, to persons who are already Christians. Almost all the observations which I have made, are indeed, in their full

force, applicable to them also. To sinners they are all applicable; and are all, in every sense, in their power, while they continue sinners. The *last* is as truly of this nature, as those which preceded it.

Every sinner may, antecedently to his regeneration, entertain a full conviction that the Scriptures are worthy of all acceptation. With this conviction solemnly impressed on the mind, every sinner may hear the gospel. Every sinner may also feel this truth in a strong and affecting manner. Awakened to a sense of his guilt and danger, he does thus actually feel, antecedently to any essential change in his moral character. But *what some sinners do feel, all others may feel.* But under this conviction, and this sense, all those are sanctified, who are sanctified at all. With these very views of divine truth upon their minds, the Spirit of God communicates to them, I do not mean to every one who is in this situation; for this I am not warranted to say, nor to believe; but to most of them, perhaps to all who do not voluntarily relinquish their convictions; that change of heart, which is commonly styled regeneration; a change, infinitely important to every child of Adam.

'Faith,' says St. Paul, 'cometh by hearing.' I have endeavoured to describe the manner of hearing in which it comes. It is to be still carefully remembered, that unless faith is actually obtained and exercised, no mode of hearing whatever will ultimately be of any value. The mode which I have pointed out is, in my apprehension, inestimably valuable, as means eminently useful to this great end.

What is true of *hearing* the gospel, is substantially true of *reading* it; and of reading also other religious books. The Scriptures particularly, and other religious books generally, are to be read with great care, and with all the views which I have expressed; that we may be able to judge whether those who preach to us, preach the truth of God. They are to be read also, that we may keep alive, and in full force, the impressions communicated by preaching

Finally, they are to be read, that we may gain the full advantages of all our opportunities between the returns of the sabbath; and furnish ourselves with daily instruction, with reproofs for our daily sins, with encouragement to our daily duties, and with powerful motives to a daily progress in the divine life.

REMARKS.

1. *From these observations it is evident, that those who do not hear in the manner which has been described, are, even according to their own principles, wholly inexcusable.*

All persons, present at the preaching of the gospel, can, if they please, solemnly remember that it is the word of God—that they are sinners, who infinitely need salvation—that in the gospel only the terms and means of salvation are published to mankind—that these, in order to be of any use to them, must be understood by themselves—that their opportunities of hearing it are few—and that the present is the best, and may be the last, which they will ever enjoy—that the Scriptures contain all the rules of life, by which they will be judged—that God is an eye-witness of the manner in which they hear—and that the gospel is worthy of all acceptation, and ought, therefore, to be received with the heart, as well as with the understanding. To hear in this manner demands no especial communication from God; and he who does not thus hear, is stripped of the pretence even of self-justification. It is indeed equally the duty of every man to hear with evangelical faith. But as this faith is the gift of God, unrenowned men are ever prone to feel themselves, in some degree, excusable in neglecting to hear with this exercise of the heart. This apprehension is, I acknowledge, entirely without foundation. Still it exists. But in the present case, on their own ground, no plea can be offered, which will even satisfy themselves. Let them therefore, when guilty of this negligence, ‘lay their hands upon their mouths, and their mouths in the dust, and confess their guilt before God.’

Of this miserable class of sinners not a small num

ber are, sabbath by sabbath, seen in this house. Almost all who assemble here are in the morning of life; when, if ever, the heart is tender, and easily susceptible of divine impressions from the word of God. Almost all enjoy also the peculiar blessings of a liberal and religious education, and the best opportunities of knowing their duty, and their danger. Still, in defiance of the solemn commands of religion, and the authority of God, as well as of common decency, there are those who quietly lay their heads down to sleep when the prayer is ended, or the psalm read. These persons are indeed present in the house of God; but they are present only to insult him, to cast contempt upon the cross of Christ, and to grieve in the most shameful manner the Spirit of grace. They can hardly be said to hear at all. They come into the presence of God, merely to declare to him, and to all who are present, that they will not hear nor obey his voice; and to 'treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the judgment.' Let them remember, that the God who made them, and in whose hands their breath is, is here; and that his all-searching eye is fixed with an intense and dreadful survey upon their conduct, and upon their hearts. Let them remember, that he hath said, 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and ye have not regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind. Then shall ye call, but I will not answer. Ye shall seek me early, and shall not find me: because ye hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.'

Let those also, who with more decency, and more momentary wisdom, really hear, and yet with the slightest temptations forget what they hear—vessels, into which the water of life is poured, only to be poured out again—remember, that they hear to no valuable end. The true end of this privilege is 're-

penitance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.' This end they prevent in themselves, by an absolute destitution of serious and deep concern for their salvation. In their final ruin they will find little comfort in remembering this frail, feeble attention to the word of God. It will be a melancholy support in that terrible day, to say to their Judge 'We have eaten and drank in thy presence; and thou hast taught in our streets:' when they hear him reply, 'Depart from me, for I know you not, ye workers of iniquity!'

2. *How infinitely desirable is it, that we should hear with good and honest hearts!*

This, and this only, is obeying, in the proper sense the command of our Saviour. As the gospel is plainly 'worthy of all acceptation,' to accept it in this manner is the indispensable duty of every man to whom it is preached. To this end we should remember, that our all is depending; our virtue, usefulness, and peace in the present life; our hope and support in death; our acquittal in the judgment; our escape from final perdition; and our introduction to eternal glory in the kingdom of our heavenly Father. What dreadful emotions must every careless, stupid sinner experience on a death-bed, when he calls to mind, that he squandered, with infinite prodigality, all his opportunities of gaining salvation, and cast away the blessings of comfort and hope for ever! Amid the solemn scenes of such a bed, when life is trembling and fluttering over the abyss of destruction; the pulse forgetting to beat, the soul struggling, and clinging to its tenement of clay, with awful anticipations of the judgment; how overwhelming must it be to remember, that every prayer and sermon, that the gospel itself, and all the blessings which it contains, although so frequently offered by God with infinite kindness, were only despised, neglected, and forgotten! But the lamp is now gone out, the oil expended, and the door shut. Nothing therefore, remains to the infatuated votary of sense and sin, but 'the blackness of darkness for ever!'

SERMON CXXXIX.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE NATURE, SEASONS, AND OBLIGATIONS OF
PRAYER.

Pray without ceasing.—1 THESS. v. 17.

THE preceding Discourse was occupied by considerations on the two first of those means of grace which were formerly mentioned; viz. the preaching and hearing of the gospel, and the reading of the Scriptures, and other religious books. I shall now proceed to the examination of the third of those means; viz. prayer.

In this examination I shall depart from the scheme which was pursued in the preceding Discourse, and shall consider the subject generally under the following heads:—

I. *The nature, and,*II. *The seasons of prayer.*III. *The obligations to pray.*IV. *The usefulness of prayer.*V. *The encouragements to it.*VI. *The objections usually made against it.*I. *I shall briefly consider the nature of prayer.*

Prayer, according to the language of the Westminster Catechism, 'is the offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and a thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.' This definition is undoubtedly just; yet it is in a degree defective. Prayer is an act of worship, consisting of four great parts; adoration, confession, petition, and thanksgiving.

The first of these, adoration, consists in solemnly reciting the character of God; and in reverentially ascribing to him the glory due to his name for the

infinite perfections which he possesses, and for all the manifestations which he has made of himself in his word, and in his works.

The second, *confession*, demands no comment.

The third, *petition*, is both by reason and revelation confined to 'things which are agreeable to the will' of God. His will involves whatever is right and good; and nothing which is not agreeable to it is in reality desirable.

Thanksgiving, the last of these subjects, is so generally and so well understood, as to need no explanation at the present time.

All these are to be offered up to God 'in the name of Christ,' in obedience to his express command. Unless they are so offered, they cannot, under the Christian dispensation, be accepted.

II. *The principal seasons of prayer are the following:—*

1. *The sabbath.*

On this holy day we are required to devote ourselves to this duty in a peculiar manner. A prime part of the religious service to which it is destined consists of prayer. For this reason the sanctuary is appropriately styled the 'house of prayer.' Thus God says in Isaiah, 'I will make them joyful in my house of prayer;' and again, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.' These promises immediately respect Christian nations; and teach in the clearest manner the proper destination of the house of God, and of the day upon which especially it is occupied by religious assemblies. The Jewish church worshipped in this manner on *their sabbath*; and the primitive Christian church on the *Lord's day*. These examples have been followed in every age of Christianity by those who in any country have worn the Christian name.

Nor is the sabbath a season of *public* prayer only; it is equally to be employed in *private* prayer. On this sacred day, God has required a peculiar attention to all our religious duties; at home, as well as in the sanctuary. Every advantage for this purpose is furnished by this heavenly season. The consecra-

tion of this holy day by the fourth command, by his own resting upon the first sabbath, and by the resurrection of the Redeemer; the celebration of it by the church in all the ages of time; the blessing originally annexed to it; and the sanctification acquired, and increased, in the minds of many millions of the human race, all unite to designate it as being pre-eminently the season of prayer. With these affecting views of the sabbath, all others conspire. On this day mankind assemble in the house of God as brethren, and as children of the same divine Parent, to worship their Creator, to learn his holy will, and to obtain a title to endless life. Here, with one united voice, they confess their sins before him. Hither they come, to acknowledge their dependance on him for the communication of every blessing, and the fulfilment of every hope. Here they stand as mere suppliants for mercy; for the forgiveness of their sins, and the renovation of their souls. Hither they come, to be employed only in religious thoughts, affections, and pursuits; to act as spiritual and immortal beings; and to appear as candidates for everlasting life. Here, the word of God is presented to them as a law, immutable and eternal, which they have violated, and by which they are condemned; as the news and means of restoration to safety, hope, and life; as the manifestation of his character, and our own; and as the tidings of a future resurrection, judgment, and immortality. Hither they come, on this sacred day, into the immediate presence of God, as the reconcilable Father of mankind; infinitely great, venerable, and lovely in his character. Here they behold the Saviour in all his peculiar glory and beauty, his transcendent compassion and self-denial. His condescension and humiliation, his preaching and miracles, his sufferings and death, his resurrection and exaltation, are here presented in his word and ordinances, and pencilled by the hand of Jehovah.

This holy season is the day appointed by God himself, as a perpetual festival, for the commemora-

tion of these glorious things; especially of the creation and redemption of mankind, and of the divine perfections manifested in these wonderful works. As such a festival it is regarded and acknowledged by all who assemble for his worship.

To all these things the strong power of sympathy lends an interest, a solemnity, a capacity for affecting the soul, unrivalled in its nature, and attainable in no other situation.

As on the sabbath these things are eminently felt in the house of God, so the spirit imbibed here is extended to every thing of the same nature, when contemplated in our own dwellings. Thither we carry the feelings originated in the sanctuary, and there we prolong the views which the sabbath has already inspired. In both places, therefore, we are furnished with advantages for praying fervently and acceptably at this happy season, which obviously make the sabbath by way of distinction the day of prayer.

2. *Such occasional days as are warranted by the word of God, and appointed by the rulers of mankind, for public worship, are also important seasons of prayer.*

Public annual festivals for national thanksgiving, and public days of national humiliation and prayer, were enjoined by God upon the Israelites; the only nation to whom, as such, he ever gave laws and institutions. The institutions and laws of Moses are binding on us no farther than as they are applicable to our circumstances. Political and ceremonial branches of this system are not, and cannot be, applicable to the state of any modern, or Christian, nation. They are therefore abrogated, as we are amply assured in the Scriptures themselves. But these national thanksgivings and fasts are no less applicable to the state of all nations than to that of the Israelites. For all nations equally with them have sins to be confessed and lamented, and blessings to be remembered and acknowledged. God also has been pleased to regard, in a favourable and merciful manner, public fasts, not directly appointed by himself. Thus, when the Ninevites, alarmed by the

prediction of Jonah, kept a day of solemn humiliation and fasting for their sins, God 'repented of the evil, that he said he would do unto them;' and he did it not. In consequence of the fast also of the Jews in Shushan, on account of the ruin threatened to their nation by the malicious fraud of Haman, God accomplished their deliverance in a manner equally wonderful and glorious. Important blessings seem also to have been given in consequence of the fasts proclaimed severally by Ezra and Nehemiah. The public services of these days are usually the same with those of the sabbath. Prayer, particularly, is a prime part of them all. On such days the ancient churches assembled to acknowledge the goodness of God to them, and to confess and lament their sins against him. In these religious solemnities they have been followed extensively by the church in later times.

3. *The morning and evening of every day are, in a peculiar manner, seasons of prayer.*

This truth was taught directly by the morning and evening sacrifice, under the Mosaic dispensation. Aaron, and the succeeding high-priests, were commanded, Exod. xxx. 7, 'to burn incense on the altar of incense every morning.' See also Exod. xxxvi. 3; Exod. xii. Levit. vi. 12. In like manner the evening sacrifice and oblation are often mentioned; as in 1 Kings xviii. 29; 2 Kings xvi. 15; Ezra ix. 4; and Dan. ix. 21.

In conformity to the language of this institution, David declares that he steadily performed this religious duty every morning and every evening, and also at noon every day. Daniel prayed to his God 'three times a day.' Job also offered sacrifice in the morning. In the same manner, unquestionably, worshipped all the pious men of ancient times.

With the Scriptures, the nature of the case perfectly accords. In the morning we are solemnly called upon to remember the protection which God has extended to us through the night; a season in which we were wholly unable to protect ourselves.

We are required to recollect also, that he has graciously given us the blessing of sleep, and the peace and safety with which we have rested upon our beds. He who does not praise God for these indispensable gifts, must be alike ungrateful and stupid.

In the morning also we are about to enter upon the business of the day, and stand therefore in absolute need of the divine protection, favour, and blessing. How wretched should we be, and how useless, unless our food and raiment, our health and strength, our reason, and all our other useful faculties, were continued in our possession? Equally do we need security against temptation and sin, danger and harm. But for all these we are entirely dependant on God alone.

In the evening we are solemnly obligated to remember with the deepest gratitude the blessings of the day. These are the blessings which we supplicated in the morning, and which God has been pleased to bestow upon us, notwithstanding our sins. In the evening also we are about to lay ourselves down to sleep. Beside him, we have no protector; and to him we must be indebted both for the sleep itself, and for the peace and safety without which it cannot be enjoyed.

Stated and regular seasons are indispensable to the effectual performance of all business. Method, proverbially styled 'the soul of business,' cannot exist without such seasons. Irregularity, which is the prevention or the ruin of all valuable efforts, grows of course out of irregular distributions of time. That which is done at accidental seasons only, is ultimately not done at all. No business demands regularity and method more than prayer. There is in all men naturally a strong indisposition to pray. Stated seasons therefore, returning at regular periods, are peculiarly necessary to preserve this duty in its full vigour. He who prays at such seasons will always remember this duty; will form his schemes of life so, as to provide the proper places for performing it; will be reproached by his con-

science for neglecting it ; will keep alive the spirit of prayer from one season to another, so as to render the practice delightful ; and will be preserved, uninterruptedly, in the practice, by the strong influence of habit. He who prays at accidental seasons only, will first neglect, then hate, and finally desist from this duty.

The morning and evening are seasons peculiarly fitted for the regular returns of prayer. They occur at intervals, perfectly convenient ; terminate, successively, our sleep and our labour ; are seasons necessarily distinguished ; remind us regularly of all that for which we should pray ; and are effectual means of establishing in us immoveable habits of praying. They involve every thing therefore which can be either asked or wished for this interesting purpose.

As these are seasons eminently advantageous for secret prayer, so they are almost the only possible seasons for the united devotion of families. Then, and then only, are all the members customarily present. Then the family business is either not begun, or ended, and all are at leisure to employ themselves in the worship of God. Strangers then do not intrude, and in this manner prevent the performance of the duty. Every thing therefore concurs at these seasons to promote and establish the method, regularity, and habit which, necessary always, are indispensable where numbers are concerned.

4. *The times at which we receive our food are proper seasons of prayer.*

On food we depend for the continuance of life ; and, of course, for the enjoyment of all temporal good. On this blessing also depends in the like manner, the continuance of our probation : and therefore all our future, spiritual good, so far as it will be gained in the present world. With this good are inseparably connected also those immortal blessings, which God will communicate as its proper reward beyond the grave. Hence, the communication of this blessing demands of us peculiar attention, gra-

titude, and acknowledgments.

These, accordingly, the Scriptures require every where at our hands. 'Every creature of God,' say they, 'is good, if it be received with thanksgiving.' They inform us also, that it is 'sanctified by the word of God,' that is, his express permission to use it, 'and by prayer.' They farther teach us, that 'God created meats, to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth. In these passages they teach us, that meats were created for this end, that they should be received by us with thanksgiving: and that, if they are not thus received, the end of their creation is not accomplished; that they are not good, when not thus received; and that they are not sanctified without prayer. The Scriptures also direct us, that 'whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do all to the glory of God.' But when we receive our food, whatever emotions we may experience within, we cannot glorify God before our fellow-men, except by asking for his blessing upon it, and rendering to him our praise for the bounty by which it is daily supplied.

In conformity with these precepts, David often solemnly praises God for the communication of this blessing to himself, and calls upon mankind to unite in the praise. The primitive Christians are exhibited by St. Paul as 'eating, and giving God thanks;' or, in other words, as 'giving God thanks, when they received their food.' Our Saviour, the perfect example to all his followers, blessed the food provided for himself and those around him, to teach us, that it is our duty always to ask that blessing of God upon our own meals, without which they cannot be either useful or desirable enjoyments. The same glorious Person also gave thanks uniformly to God for the bounties of his providence, to shew us, that we are always to remember, with gratitude and praise, the divine goodness in supplying our wants, and in thus prolonging our lives. From this glorious example, and these most reasonable precepts, are

derived ample proofs of this important duty, and the most powerful motives to perform invariably, faithfully, and with sincere delight, so desirable a service.

The very heathen were so sensible of the propriety and obligation of this duty, as enjoined by the religion of nature, that to a great extent they steadily made libations to their gods before their meals, as an acknowledgment of their indebtedness to them for their daily food. He, therefore, who, in a Christian country, neglects to praise God for his own food, cannot with propriety be called a heathen. He may with more fitness be styled an animal. Nay, in some respects, he degrades himself below the brutes. For 'the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib;' but he 'doth not know, nor even consider.'

5. *Besides these regular seasons of prayer, there are many others continually occurring which can be designated by no general name.*

The times at which all peculiar blessings are bestowed on us, are times of prayer. Whenever we are successful in any important concern, and are especially prospered, supported, or comforted; whenever we, or ours, are delivered from trouble or want, pain or sickness; whenever we escape from peculiar temptations, are placed in safety, and furnished with strength, peace, hope, and joy, with the peculiar blessings of Christian fellowship, the rectification of our views, and the improvement of our religious affections, we are especially summoned to the duties of prayer and thanksgiving.

In the same manner is prayer our especial duty at those seasons in which we are peculiarly distressed in body or in mind, are in peculiar danger, are exposed peculiarly to temptations, are sick, are bereaved of beloved friends, are threatened with alarming evils, or whenever we find ourselves the subjects of peculiar sloth, reluctance to our duty, or ready to repine at the dispensations of God's providence, or to distrust his faithfulness, or his mercy.

Nor are we less obviously called to the duties of prayer and thanksgiving by the peculiar prosperity or distresses, the dangers or deliverances of our country. I speak not here of this duty as performed in public. I refer immediately to the performances of the closet. No man can safely or warrantably neglect the interests of his country in his secret devotions. As its interests ought ever to be near his heart, so they ought ever to be remembered, when he comes into the presence of God.

In the same manner the great concerns of the church of God, ought continually to be subjects of fervent supplication. 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,' saith the psalmist, 'let my right hand forget her cunning: if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.' All the wants and woes, all the blessings and consolations, of the church of God should be felt, as the personal concerns of every Christian; and, as such, should ascend up in his daily devotions before the throne of his Maker. I only add, that both reason and revelation have made it our plain duty to pray for all men. At the times also when we ourselves commence any important business, journey, or other undertaking, which is of particular consequence to our well-being, we are required to begin our efforts with humble petitions for the guidance, protection, and blessing of God.

Retirement likewise, and solitude, the lonely walk, the chamber of meditation, and the peaceful pillow, being peculiarly friendly to this solemn enjoyment, summon us to it with peculiar motives.

Of these occasions generally, whether alluded to or specified, it is to be observed, that their return more or less every day run through life, and end only at death. All of them demand either silent or audible acknowledgments of our constant dependance on God, and our absolute indebtedness to him for all good. They demand a lively sense of his presence, perfection, and government, our supreme love and unchanging confidence to be exercised toward

aim, our daily communion with him, and our entire devotion to his service. Of all these prayer is the vehicle, the support, the soul. With it, they will live and flourish; without it they will die. According to these observations, the text directs us to 'pray without ceasing.' In the same manner, the apostle elsewhere directs us to 'pray always with all prayer; and in every thing to make known our requests unto God, with supplication, and thanksgiving.' In this manner the prophets and saints of the Old Testament, and the apostles and Christians of the New, lived before God. Prayer was the breath by which their piety was supported and preserved. Thus lived Christ himself; and thus by his example he has taught us to live. Immediately before he ordained his apostles, he spent the whole night in prayer; and this was a characteristical specimen of his life. 'Let the same mind be in you, which was also in Christ.'

III. *I shall now briefly consider our obligations to perform this duty.*

1. *To pray to God is a natural dictate of the human mind; a dictate of conscience, and common sense.*

We are absolutely dependant on God for all good. To know this, is to know a truth of immense importance to the moral system at large, and to each individual of which this system is composed. To feel it with acquiescence and joy, is to conform in our feelings, to that state of things which is agreeable to the will of God, and of course to absolute rectitude. We are bound to delight in such a dependance on the glorious and perfect Jehovah; infinitely great, and wise, and good as he is; and able and disposed as he is to supply all our wants, and to furnish us with every real blessing.

But a spirit of dependance is more awakened, cherished, and preserved by prayer than by all things else. But to cherish and preserve it in our minds is the indispensable duty, and the supreme interest of man. Few things contribute in the same degree to render us excellent, amiable, or approved by God.

Without it, we can neither be approved, amiable, nor excellent. In this view, therefore, the importance of prayer cannot be estimated.

Prayer is also the only method which nature points out of obtaining blessings from God. To prayer, as this method, we are directed by our earliest circumstances in childhood. By asking we originally expect to gain, and actually gain, all the blessings which are given to us by our parents. What they grant to our petitions, common sense directs us to hope from God, in answer to similar petitions. From analogy, which is fairly presumed to be conclusive, we determine, that the mode of obtaining good which his providence has formed for our direction with respect to earthly parents and benefactors, is the mode which we ought to pursue whenever we seek to obtain good immediately from him, our heavenly parent and Divine Benefactor. As this conduct is universal, it is justly concluded to be natural. For we have no higher proof that any thing is natural, than the fact, that it exists in all men, of all ages and nations.

The heathen universally prayed. Of this service their worship was in a great measure constituted. From California to Japan we find this every where its leading feature: and from the first periods recorded in history to the present time. There are but two sources whence this conduct can have been derived; the conclusions of reason, and the dictates of revelation. If it was derived from reason, then it was demanded by reason; if from revelation, then it is required by God.

2. *What nature has thus dictated and pursued, the Scriptures have expressly enjoined.*

It will be unnecessary for me to multiply quotations on this subject. The text, and the other passages already recited, are more than sufficient to settle the point, were it at all in dispute. But no truth is better known, or more abundantly acknowledged. I shall, therefore, only observe, that these commands are invested with all the authority of God.

3. *The example of Christ is of the same obligatory force.*

Christ, as is well known, lived a life of continual and extraordinary prayer; and thus accorded with that general prediction in the eighty-ninth Psalm, 'He shall cry unto me, Thou art my Father, and my God, and the rock of my salvation.' Accordingly, St. Paul testifies of him, Heb. v. 7, that 'in the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard, in that he feared.' This example, you know, is not only a pattern and a motive, but a law also, binding us with divine authority.

4. *Our own well-being may with strict propriety be added to these obligations, as a reason of high and commanding import.*

God has taught us, that he will be 'inquired of by mankind for the good which he is pleased to bestow upon them. The only promise, that he will give, or that we shall receive blessings, is made to such as ask: 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you;' is the only language of revelation concerning this subject. Supplication for good, therefore, is the only condition upon which it can be hoped. But we entirely need, and God is infinitely able, and disposed to give all that is really good for us. To such as ask he will give; from such as ask not he will withhold. Of course, those who will not pray will never receive.

On our prayers then, according to the only ordinance of God with respect to this subject, all our good depends, in one important sense, both for time and eternity. We may, indeed, and we actually do, receive many things in this world, really good in themselves, for which we do not pray. But they are not, and, so long as we neglect to pray, will not be good to us. To those who omit this duty, even the blessings bestowed by God cease to be blessings. Prayer purifies the heart for the reception of them; and removes the temptations which, good as they are in themselves, they cannot fail to present to the passions and appetites even of a religious man.

In eternity those who in this world neglect to pray will experience nothing which is in itself good, but will find that, as they refused to ask here, God will refuse to give for ever.

All these sources of obligation lend their whole force to all the seasons, occasions, and kinds of prayer; to the public worship of the sabbath, and of authorized fasts and festivals; to the morning and evening sacrifice; to the religious service at our meals; and to the prayers offered up on the numberless occasions presented by our daily returning wants, sufferings, and enjoyments. On all these occasions, they are accordingly to be felt, acknowledged, and obeyed. Of course, we are to remember, to feel, and willingly to feel, nay, to feel with delight and gratitude, that it is our indispensable duty, our highest interest, and our glorious privilege, to 'pray always, with all prayer and supplication, with giving of thanks: for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.' Amen.

SERMON CXL.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO INDIVIDUALS

Pray without ceasing.—1 THESS. v. 17.

IN the preceding Discourse, I considered the *nature and seasons of prayer*, and the *obligations* which we are under to pray. I shall now discuss, at some length, the fourth subject proposed at that time; viz. the *usefulness of prayer*.

The observations which I shall make concerning this subject will be included under the following general heads:—

The usefulness of prayer by its own proper influence and,

Its efficacy in procuring blessings from God.

The first of these heads, viz. *the usefulness of prayer by its own proper influence*, I shall consider as it respects *individuals, families, and public societies*.

In this Discourse it is my intention to exhibit *the usefulness of prayer to individuals, by its proper influence on themselves*.

Before I proceed to the direct discussion of this subject, it will be useful to observe, that the *personal concerns* of an individual are the proper subjects of *secret prayer*. The propriety of such prayer is wholly derived from the fact, that we have many important interests which are only personal, and require to be transacted between us and our Maker. In their very nature, they are incapable of being disclosed to our fellow-creatures, without material disadvantages. Often they are such as we would not on any account reveal to any human being whatever. Often the disclosure, although not injurious to our moral or intellectual character, would wound our delicacy, or involve us in other kinds of distress. In a multitude of instances, where they are already *partially* known, we are still unable to disclose them entirely, and with that freedom which is indispensable to the due performance of this duty. Before our Maker, strange as it may seem, we can use a freedom of communication which cannot be exercised towards any created being. We know that he is already acquainted with whatever we have experienced, done, or suffered, either within or without the mind. We know that he is infinitely removed from all the partialities and prejudices, from all those cold, unkind, and contemptuous sentiments, which are so generally cherished by our fellow-men. We know that **he** will not betray us; but, however unworthy we have been, will regard us, if sincere and penitent, with kindness and mercy. We approach him therefore with a freedom, a confidence of communication, which can be used towards no other being in the universe.

Besides, God is nearer to all men, than any man to another. If we are willing to choose him as our friend, he is infinitely the nearest, the best, the most

affectionate of all friends. With him therefore a communion can, and does exist, which no creature can hold with a fellow-creature.

In consequence of these facts, a freedom, and a fervency also, exists in secret prayer, when the subject of it is our personal concerns, which cannot exist in the presence of others.

With these things premised, I observe, that the usefulness of prayer to individuals is found,

1. *In the peculiar solemnity which it naturally induces on the mind.*

In secret prayer, a man comes directly into the presence of God. This great and awful Being is the source of all solemn thoughts and emotions in his creatures, and the object in which such thoughts ultimately terminate. Every thing in *his* character, every thing in *our* character and circumstances, every thing in our relations to him, and in the situation in which we are thus placed, the end for which we have entered our closets, the duty which we are performing, the retirement from the world, the presence of God, and the consciousness that his eye is on our hearts, all these conspire to drive away every trifling thought, and to banish every improper emotion. It is scarcely possible that the man, who has withdrawn to his closet, for the purpose of meeting God face to face, and who here remembers before whom he stands, on what business he has come, and of what importance that business is to himself, should fail to fix his thoughts in solemnity and awe, and hush every tendency to an unbecoming emotion.

To all men this state of mind is eminently useful, and indispensably necessary. Spiritual and immortal concerns demand, of course, and most obviously, this state of mind. We cannot attend to them in any other state with advantage, nor without serious disadvantage. We cannot see them as they are, nor feel them as they are. We cannot be influenced to attend to them, nor to provide for them, as they indispensably demand. As they are of all possible consequence to us, so this state of mind, the only one

in which we can usefully attend to them, becomes of a proportional importance.

Thus forgiveness of sin, a restoration to holiness, resolutions to perform our duty, the effectual pursuit of salvation, and the final escape from ruin, can never be useful objects of attention and effort to him, whose mind is not settled in that state of solemnity which these mighty concerns require. The soul which is given up to levity regards them, of course, with habitual indifference, and not unfrequently with habitual contempt. By a man of this character therefore they will be neglected and forgotten.

2. *Prayer is useful to an individual, as it enlightens and quickens the conscience.*

Conscience is the judgment of the mind concerning its moral conduct, both internal and external. By this judgment of the mind, we are, and of necessity must be, ultimately directed in every case of a moral nature. It is therefore of the utmost importance that it should be formed aright.

Conscience also is used both in the Scriptures, and elsewhere, with a direct reference to those emotions, or feelings, which we experience, when this judgment is formed; and which usually have more or less influence upon the formation of the judgment itself, and upon the conduct by which it is followed. When these are just and vigorous, we are not only directed, but prompted to act aright. When they are dull and lifeless, we are apt, how just soever the judgment may be, either not to act at all, or to act in direct violation of its dictates. In every such case our conduct is sinful; and often when, under the influence of a conscience more tender and susceptible, it would have been virtuous. Hence the plain necessity of having our consciences quickened, or made alive to our duty. 'A seared conscience' denotes, not the want of a capacity to judge, but an insensibility to the importance of moral good and evil.

Among the means placed in our power of enlightening and quickening the conscience, prayer, after the Scriptures, is in my view the first, and far supe-

rior to any other. It is also the chief mean of rendering the Scriptures themselves effectual to this end.

When we stand in our closets, immediately before God, are secluded from the world, and withdrawn from every eye but his; when we feel the awe inspired by a clear view of his character, and realize in an affecting manner his presence and inspection; it can hardly be possible for us not to entertain concerning our Creator, ourselves, and all moral objects, views exceedingly different from those gross apprehensions which we experience in ordinary circumstances. We can hardly fail to discern our sinful character, and to regard sin as a real and great evil. God, in spite of all our ordinary stupidity, will then appear to be an awful, perfect, and glorious Being; his law to be holy, just, and good; its extent to comprehend all our thoughts and actions alike; its nature, demands, and penalties to be unchangeable; and ourselves to be condemned, and, if left in our present condition, to be ruined. In this situation we farther discern, of course, that many things are sinful, which we have customarily regarded as innocent; and that many things are duties, to perform which we have heretofore felt little or no obligation.

These views are particularly enlarged, and rendered more distinct, by means of our confessions and petitions. When we confess our sins before God, we are compelled to such sincerity of thought, as well as of speech, as must induce us to throw aside a multitude of prejudices, self-justifications, and self-flatteries; usually, and very pleasingly, cherished. We know that we cannot deceive God; and are certain that even our inmost thoughts are naked to the all-seeing eye. Little inducement is presented to us, therefore, to think falsely of our conduct. So far as our views extend, they naturally become just and scriptural. In this state, every sin which we confess is apt to be seen as it is; as a sin, as a violation of the law of God, as an act of opposition to his will, and as a source to us of guilt and condemnation. The vanity strongly appears of attempting to

hide our guilt from his sight ; and of course the necessity, as well as the duty, of acknowledging it before him. Hence, while the confession of all our sins is forcibly prompted, the confession of each is naturally rendered sincere. Hence also the sinner sees many things to be sinful, which he has usually thought innocent, perhaps virtuous ; and the whole number of his sins to be far greater than he has before mistrusted.

In our *petitions* we ask for the blessing of God. If we ask for forgiveness, we ask for the forgiveness of our sins ; and of course discern that we have sins to be forgiven. This forgiveness is necessary for *every* sin. While the eye of the mind is employed in wandering with solemn anxiety over this interesting subject, and inquiring with deep solicitude what, and how numerous, are the cases in which this forgiveness is needed ; it is impossible for us not to perceive that we have many, very many, sins to be forgiven.

If we ask for sanctification, we ask it for sinners, to whom this blessing is necessary. In the same character we ask for justification, for adoption, for increase of grace, and for perseverance unto the end. In a word, our guilty character will recur, and present itself before our eyes, with every petition which we make.

Nor will the necessity and excellence of holiness appear with less evidence. Sin is our ruin ; holiness is our recovery. Both are alike important ; the one being as dreadful, as the other is desirable. Of all the blessings for which we ask, holiness is the basis, the means, and the end. To every one of them it inseparably adheres ; with every one it is intimately blended. Our views therefore will be as naturally, and as extensively engaged by it, and be as naturally rendered clear and impressive.

As these two great attributes are the only ones which characterize our moral conduct, so the clearer and brighter our views of these things are, the more enlightened, of course, is our conscience, or the

judgment of our minds concerning that conduct. When we ask God for his blessing on any thing which we are about to do, we shall in this way discern with more certainty its real nature, especially as it appears to our own view, than in any other situation. We often, as we think, convince ourselves by reasoning, that a proposed pursuit is lawful and right; when we in fact believe it to be otherwise. In most, if not all such cases, the *first judgment* of our minds, that which we usually denominate the decision of conscience, has already determined it to be wrong. On the *future reasoning*, inclination has usually had no small share of influence, and has warped the judgment of the mind so as to lead it to false conclusions. With these conclusions, however, we are but too prone to feel satisfied.

But if we attempt to ask the blessing of God upon such conduct in our closets, we shall often find our attempts to be vain. Our mouths will be stopped, and our efforts to pray annihilated. Some persons declare, and appear to believe, that *gaming is lawful* and justifiable. But no one ever asked, no one can ever seriously ask, the blessing of God on a design to game. There are persons who declare *lewdness* to be lawful. But no person can ask God to bless a lewd purpose. An attempt of this nature would choke the utterance even of a profligate.

When we ask the same blessing on similar conduct already past, the same consequences will follow; and we shall be forced, in spite of ourselves, to acknowledge and feel the guilt of that which is sinful. Notwithstanding his utmost efforts, the sinner will be checked in all his attempts to pray, so long as he justifies, so long as he does not confess and lament his guilty conduct, however satisfied with himself he was in the perpetration. Until he becomes willing to forsake his sins, they will 'hinder his prayers.' Nor can he continue to sin, and continue to pray.

This doctrine St. Peter teaches in the third chapter of his first epistle. In the seventh verse, he

directs husbands to live with their wives, as in the preceding verses he had directed wives to live with their husbands, in the performance of all the duties of conjugal affection, and in a general obedience to the precepts of the gospel. For these directions he subjoins his reason in the following words; 'that your prayers be not hindered.' According to this decision of the apostle, disobedience to the gospel, and the neglect of the duties required by it, hinder, of course, the prayers of mankind. In other words, *sin is the direct hindrance of prayer*. Every person who prays to God, will continually find, by his own experience, that this account of the subject is true; and that, whenever he sins, his prayers are hindered. Of course, he will be obliged to relinquish his sins, or desist from his prayers. Should he continue to pray, all the views which I have mentioned, and all others like them, will continually recur, and will soon become habitual. They will soon constitute the general current of his thinking on moral subjects. But the more clear, distinct, and habitual our thoughts concerning moral subjects become, the more strongly, and the more uniformly, shall we feel these subjects. Their importance will not only be seen, but regarded with much solemnity, deep interest, and influential concern. The soul, continuing in prayer without ceasing, becomes alive to all such subjects. These are the chief subjects of its prayers; and prayer is its chief duty. Moral subjects, therefore, resume their proper place and rank in its estimation, and find a susceptibility in its regard wholly due to *them*, and immensely interesting to *itself*. In this way prayer contributes, to a degree which cannot be limited, to withdraw the soul from sin, to disarm temptations of their fascinating influence, to weaken the power of passion, and to increase the hopes and means of resistance. In the same manner are the views and emotions which regard holiness, improved; and resolution and strength gained to make progress in the divine life.

3. *Prayer is useful to unregenerated individuals, by*

teaching them, that, so long as they continue in this state, they cannot pray in the manner required by God.

Unregenerate men, when affected with a deep sense of their guilt, and a solemn concern for their future destiny, universally pray. But all such men, before they have made attempts of this nature, believe, whatever may be their creed, that they can pray with their present disposition, so as at least to satisfy themselves; and, not improbably, so as to be acceptable to God. There is no way within my knowledge, in which they so effectually unlearn this doctrine, and so entirely give up this belief, as by their own attempts at prayer. The peculiarly clear, distinct, and affecting views of moral subjects, which I have already mentioned, are of course directed to their prayers, as well, as much, and probably more, than to any other subjects of this nature. Their prayers, in the act of offering them up to God, are seen by them in a light, and with a distinctness and certainty, never perhaps experienced in any other case. Amid the anxiety and earnestness with which awakened sinners pray, they come, without an exception, first to doubt their own ability to pray as they ought; and then, without a doubt, to believe that their prayers are wholly destitute of evangelical worth: at least, I never knew an exception to this process in any person who, in this situation, has disclosed his views of the subject to me. Perhaps I ought rather to say, I remember none. This important part of self-knowledge, is, I believe rarely, if at all, acquired in any other way. In this situation, and by these means, sinners, if I mistake not, are chiefly brought to a state of absolute humiliation, and a full conviction of their entire dependance on Christ for holiness and salvation. Not to be able to pray, so as to be in some degree satisfied and comforted by our prayers, is to be poor indeed. This humbled, dependant state of the mind, is, as I formerly observed, that in which the grace of the gospel is usually bestowed on men.

4. Prayer is useful to individuals, as it teaches them their dependance on God.

The act of asking for blessings in prayer, which is its primary employment, brings up forcibly to our view, the impossibility of furnishing them to ourselves. The blessings also for which we ask, are seen to be absolutely necessary for us, and such as none but God can give. They are the result of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness alone. Of these interesting truths, the suppliant cannot fail to perceive the clearest evidence, and to experience the strongest impression.

To this sense of dependance on God, our *adoration*, in which we recite his glorious perfections in the most solemn manner; our *confession*, in which we recount our sins and wants, our infinite need of forgiveness, and our utter insufficiency to supply ourselves with the necessary good, and our *thanksgiving*, in which we acknowledge that all the blessings enjoyed by us have come from God only; irresistibly conspire to make large additions. As the God, whose immensely great and glorious character we humbly and solemnly repeat, is presented to our view as rich in all good, we feel ourselves to be poor, and little, and sinful, and naked, and in want of all things.

Alone, withdrawn from the world, in the immediate presence of Jehovah, we cannot but see these things in the strongest light, and by themselves. The eye of the mind is turned solely and intensely upon them, and prevented from the obscurity, confusion, and consequent perplexity, which necessarily attend all complicated views. With such apprehensions, we can scarcely fail to feel in the deepest manner, this most important subject. It becomes the burden of our thoughts and our language. The value of the blessings themselves, our indebtedness to God for them, our own unworthiness of them all, and the mercy manifested in bestowing them, unitedly impress them on our hearts with a force peculiar and pre-eminent.

As the pardon of our sins, and the justification, adoption, and sanctification of our souls, constitute the means of all other good, so they are seen, felt, and acknowledged even by the convinced sinner, to be his own highest and immediate good. For this good he will cry with intense earnestness to him, in whom alone he finds either ability or disposition to communicate this invaluable blessing. With deep humiliation, with intense anguish, he casts himself at the foot of the cross, with the prayer of the publican, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' or with that of the disciples, when the ship in which they were conveyed was ready to sink, 'Lord save me, or I perish!' In this situation of the soul, desponding, convinced of its guilt and danger, and feeling the infinite necessity of forgiveness and renovation, God, in all his ordinary providence, has been graciously pleased to extend mercy to sinners, and to bring them into his kingdom. This is not done because of any excellency in their prayers, or in their characters; for no such excellency exists: but because they infinitely need his mercy; and also, if I am not deceived, because there is an evident propriety in bestowing it on them, when in this situation, rather than while they are stupid, blind, and hardened in their sins.

The Christian, in the same manner, learns with still more clearness and stronger affections, his own absolute dependance on his Maker. All his springs of holiness and happiness he perceives to be in God. Innumerable sins he discovers lying at his door; many and various lusts remaining in his heart; wants of many kinds, and of great importance, rising up continually to his view; his guilt dreadfully great, and his danger extreme. No being but God can remove the evils from which he suffers, or those which he dreads. None but God can supply the blessings which he feels to be his all.

In the whole of the Christian course, he realizes, in the most affecting manner, his absolute necessity of being enabled by the grace of God to resist tempta-

tations, to overcome lust, to vanquish enemies, to subdue sin, and to advance in obedience. Every evil affection he sees capable of being removed or lessened by the assistance of God only ; and by the same assistance he must be furnished with all his ability to live a holy life, and to cultivate every virtuous propensity. From God only, he also knows, must be derived his daily hope, support, and consolation ; peace of mind, evidence of the love of God, increase in grace, and ‘ a patient continuance in well-doing.’ God only can cleanse his soul, refine and exalt his views, remove his fears, quicken his affections, brighten his hopes, and multiply his joys. All these are blessings, possessed by none beside the Infinite Mind ; and gifts of none but the Almighty Hand. At the same time, they are blessings which God is supremely pleased to bestow. His nature is bounty ; and giving is his favourite employment.

But he is pleased to be ‘ inquired of’ for all blessings. Ready as he is to bestow, it is his pleasure that all his rational creatures should ask. Accordingly he requires ‘ all flesh to come to him’ with their requests ; and, for their encouragement, styles himself ‘ a God hearing prayer.’ With these delightful views of the divine character, and with affecting apprehensions of his own circumstances, every Christian comes to God ; and finds in prayer peculiar encouragement, hope, assistance, strength, enjoyment, and universal edification.

5. *Prayer is useful to individuals, as it furnishes to them the best views of the divine character.*

Prayer brings home to the mind, the character of God with peculiar advantage in many ways. Some of these have been already mentioned, as being inseparably connected with the subjects which I have had occasion to consider. Several others I shall now briefly recount. It is impossible that a suppliant should fail to remember, with peculiar strength and conviction, this glorious Being as his Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor, his Father, Redeemer,

and Sanctifier. These are the themes of his prayer in all the parts of it, and are perpetually recurring. They rise in his adoration, confession, thanksgivings, and petitions. They rise in every profitable form. He cannot think of a want, a sin, or a blessing, without realizing against whom his sins have been committed, by whom his wants must be supplied, and from whom his blessings must flow. He cannot but recall with deep affection, the justice of that great Being whom he has offended; the holiness of him, whose image he is required to exhibit; the purity of him, whose all-seeing eye is intent on his sins; the power of him, by whom he was created, and has been alway preserved; and the goodness, faithfulness, truth, and mercy of him, to whose mercy truth, and faithfulness he must be indebted for the forgiveness of his sins, and the performance of all the promises contained in the covenant of grace, and to whose goodness he must owe every future blessing of time and eternity.

In prayer, God literally draws nigh to him, and he to God. In a sense, he beholds his character in full view; as we distinctly see near objects with the bodily eye. The divine perfections are therefore realized and acknowledged, and not merely and loosely proved by argument to our understandings. Like Job, he before had heard of God 'by the hearing of the ear; but now his eye seeth him.' As his prayers return daily, so his views returning with them soon become habitual; and, like other habitual things, become continually stronger and stronger, more and more bright, just, and affecting. The great, glorious, and delightful character on which he so frequently dwells, is in a sense instamped on his heart, and always realized and enjoyed. Thus a peace and satisfaction are derived to him from prayer, for which nothing can be a substitute. By prayer, therefore, as a Christian, he lives, and lives with holiness and wisdom daily increasing; is continually a better man in all the relations of the present life, and a more and more proper candidate for

immortal happiness in the world above.

That each of the several things which I have mentioned, as effects flowing from the performance of this duty is, in an eminent degree, useful to him who performs it, will be questioned by no sober man. Still more strongly will it be perceived, that all these advantages united must be of pre-eminent importance. To be destitute of them must be, in the spiritual sense, to be ‘poor, and wretched, and miserable.’ All of them, however, exhibit this subject, when considered by themselves, in an imperfect manner. These views and dispositions, in their connexions and consequences, are branched out into others, and then into others still, in such numbers, in so continual a succession, and with such efficacious influence, as to affect, with the greatest advantage, the whole Christian character, and to reach through every part of the Christian life. Every where their influence is felt, and wherever it is felt is benign and happy. Hence, the Scriptures insist so abundantly on the performance of this duty; and, to secure their benevolent purpose, multiply every where, commands, examples, and promises.

REMARKS.

From this summary and imperfect account of the usefulness of prayer to individuals, I remark,

1. *That he who does not habitually pray to God, cannot be a Christian.*

God has commanded us to pray to him; and is pleased to be ‘inquired of’ by his creatures, for all the good which they need. He who does not pray, violates continually a plain command of the Scriptures; and proves himself indifferent to the great and comprehensive duty of obeying his Maker. But this is a contradiction to the whole Christian character.

This, however, is not the only ground of the conclusion, nor that on which I meant principally to insist at the present time. In the character and circumstances of a Christian is laid the most solid foundation of habitual prayer. His sins perpetually

present to him the infinite necessity of forgiveness and sanctification. His love to God, and his goodwill to mankind, excite in him, by their very nature, unceasing desires, and generate vigorous efforts to increase this evangelical character. His faith in Christ, and his disposition to obey his commands, require continual additions of strength; and the peculiar consolation, peace, and hope which he finds in prayer, and which without prayer he cannot find, call unceasingly upon him to be faithful, steadfast, and fervent in this duty. A hungry man might as well be expected to abstain from food, or a thirsty man from drink, as a Christian from prayer. Prayer is the breath on which Christianity lives, and from which it derives peculiarly its power, activity, and enjoyment. Mark the manner in which David describes his distress in being cut off from the solemn services of the tabernacle; and the relief, the comfort, the strength, and the joy, which he found when he drew nigh to that holy place. Mark the discourses of our Saviour on this subject, and the most edifying example of performing this duty, which he has left on record for our imitation. Attend diligently to the commands, exhortations, and encouragements given by St. Paul, to engage us to 'continue always in all prayer.' Here you will see with the most certain evidence how naturally, and how irresistibly, holiness prompts to the performance of this duty. Such is the spirit by which all Christians are governed, and without which no man can be a Christian. By our fruits are we known, both to ourselves and to others. Prayer is the prominent fruit of the Christian spirit; and where this fruit is not found, it will be in vain to search for the tree.

From these observations we easily learn the reason why hypocrites rarely continue steadfast for any length of time, in secret prayer. A sinner, under strong convictions of sin, will betake himself of course to his closet. Why will he do this? He is still a sinner, and a stranger to the evangelical character. He finds no part of the Christian's pleasure in things divine;

in obedience to God, or the contemplation of his perfections, commands, or designs; in his sabbath, word, or ordinances. Of that relish for spiritual objects which is implanted in regeneration, and which constitutes what is called the spiritual mind, he is wholly destitute. In seeking salvation, however, he is altogether in earnest; and in seeking the forgiveness of his sins, and the sanctification of his heart, as indispensable means of this most interesting attainment. Hence he prays. But to this character the hypocrite is a stranger, and feels not therefore these inducements to prayer.

Still more is he a stranger to the views, affections, and enjoyments of a Christian. For spiritual objects he has no relish, no desire. In the character of God, the character of Christ, and the nature of religion, he finds no pleasure, and sees no profit, except so far as hypocrisy may increase his reputation, and promote his selfish purposes. For this, his governing end, he will often appear more engaged in religion when he expects to be seen by men, than Christians themselves. In public and family prayer he will frequently be exact and abundant; because this conduct will gain him the character which he covets. Here others see him. Here therefore he finds an advantage sufficient to excite his perseverance in these external services.

But in secret prayer there can be no gain, beside that which is spiritual and immortal. No reputation can spring from conduct unknown to men. If therefore the hypocrite begins the performance of this duty, he will usually soon desist; because, on the one hand, he has no anxiety about salvation, and, on the other, no delight in the duty. Accordingly, Job says of the hypocrite, 'will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?' that is, he will *not* always call upon God. He will, at times, call upon God for a little period; but will cease, of course, from this duty, after that period is ended; because he expects from it neither profit nor pleasure.

2. From these observations it is evident, also, that he

who does not pray is guilty of pre-eminent folly.

Prayer is the only communication between mankind and their Maker, and the only means of obtaining blessings from him. The man who refuses or neglects to pray, voluntarily cuts himself off therefore from all hope of good. The easiest, least expensive, least burdensome, possible mode of acquiring good, is to ask for it. God has been pleased to constitute this the only mode of obtaining it from him. He therefore who does not pray, cannot rationally hope for any blessing.

To renounce all good, when it is attainable by any means, however difficult, is the conduct of a fool. To renounce it, when the means are the easiest possible, is the conduct of a madman. Such a fool, such a madman, is he who neglects prayer. To pray costs neither money, pains, nor time. Why do multitudes in this house neglect to pray? The true explanation of this mysterious, sottish violation of every dictate of reason, conscience, and revelation is, that all these persons hate their duty. They 'sin against God, and wrong their own souls; they hate him, and love death.'

SERMON CXLI.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO FAMILIES.

Praying always with all prayer.—EPH. vi. 10.

HAVING considered the usefulness of prayer to individuals, I shall now, according to the scheme proposed, examine its usefulness to families.

The text, as will be seen by attending to its connexion with the preceding verse, contains a command in which we are required to 'pray always (*ἐν παντί, τὸ καίρῳ*, at every season), with all prayer ;'

that is, with prayer of every kind ; or prayer offered up to God in every form. By this precept, then mankind are commanded to pray at every season suited to the performance of this duty ; and with such prayer as becomes the circumstances, wants, and characters of those by whom the duty is to be performed.

That *family prayer* is included in this general direction, as one kind of prayer especially suited to the wants and circumstances of mankind, will not be questioned by most of those who profess the religion of the gospel. Nor will it be doubted, that every morning and every evening presents a proper season for the performance of this religious service.

In examining the proposed subject of discourse, it will be useful to consider,

The advantages of performing,

The disadvantages of neglecting, and

The objections commonly made against this duty.

The foundation of family prayer is laid in the intimate connexion of those who are members of these little societies. This connexion necessarily creates a variety of interests, wants, enjoyments, and sufferings, which are common to them all. United in all these concerns in a very intimate manner, the several members of a family find a common interest in unitedly supplicating upon them the blessing of God, without which neither prosperity nor relief can be expected. A common interest is the source of all communion in the worship of God, whether in families, particular churches, nations, or the Christian world at large. Nor is there any reason against family worship, which does not lie against the worship of churches, and larger Christian communities. Indeed, ancient churches were not unfrequently formed of single families.

Among the *advantages* which attend *family prayer*, I shall mention the following :—

1. *The intimate communion which exists in this worship, naturally renders our devotion intense and exalted.*

Religion is in its nature social. Worship, parti-

cularly, is naturally social. Every man possessed of the spirit of the gospel, feels an interest in those things in which others are alike interested with him, which it is difficult for him to feel in things, even of the same nature, which concern himself only. Nay selfish as the human heart is, mankind are naturally more affected, on many occasions, by those concerns in which they share with others, than in those which are merely personal. He who would fly, when himself only was attacked, would fight when an enemy assaulted his family. Many a slothful man has become industrious, many a prodigal prudent, many a parsimonious man generous, and many a light-minded man sober, in consequence of the interest which he took in the affairs of his household.

All the members of a family are connected by the strong bonds of natural affection; bonds which unite human beings together with a power and intimacy found in no other circumstances of life. The sympathy here experienced is therefore intense and peculiar. The wants and interests are not only common, but near and important; reaching every heart at once; awakening instinctively a lively, vigorous concern, a powerful sympathy, and united efforts, of singular energy and ardour. The members of a family all dwell also in the same house, are daily united in one common system of employments, interchange unceasingly and habitually their kind offices, and are accustomed to rejoice and mourn, to hope and fear, to weep and smile together. No eloquence, no labour, no time is necessary to awaken these sympathetic emotions. They are caught at once, from eye to eye, and from heart to heart; and spread instantaneously, with an electric influence, through all the endeared and happy circle.

In the devotions of this little assembly, parents pray for their children, and children for their parents; the husband for his wife, and the wife for her husband; while brothers and sisters send up their requests to the throne of infinite mercy, to call down blessings upon each other. Who that wears the

same of man can be indifferent here? Must not the venerable character of the parents, the peculiar tenderness of the conjugal union, the affectionate intimacy of the filial and fraternal relations, must not the nearness of relations long existing, the interchange of kindness long continued, and the oneness of interests long cemented, all warm the heart, heighten the importance of every petition, and increase the fervour of every devotional effort?

The blessings asked for are common to all. The parent, in speaking for one member of the family, speaks, even when he does not directly design it, for every one. For here, as in the natural body, 'whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.' These blessings are also indispensable and invaluable. They are no other than the health, union, peace, prosperity, forgiveness, sanctification, and everlasting life of all this circle of beloved objects. How necessarily then must all the natural affections of the heart, and all the power of religion, conspire to render prayer, thus offered up, eminently fervent and devout! The world perhaps does not furnish a single prospect so beautiful, so lovely, to the eye of virtuous contemplation, as a family thus assembled in the morning for their affectionate devotions; combining the two most charming among all the exercises of the human heart, piety to God their common Parent, and tenderness to each other; and living through the day in that course of evangelical conduct, which is pre-eminently suited to so delightful a beginning. No priest, no minister, is so venerable as a father; no congregation so dear and tenderly beloved as a wife and children; and no oblations are offered with the same union, interest, and delight, as those of a pious and affectionate household.

2. *Family prayer eminently contributes to domestic order and regularity.*

The worship of the morning and of the evening commences and closes the concerns of the day, with

an exactness of method, almost necessarily diffused through all its concerns. The regular returns of an employment, distinguished by its importance, communicate to the business connected with it, and to those who perform it, a character of regularity, unavoidably felt, and universally prevailing. The worship of God is always of the highest importance. The spirit of religion which dictates it is, in its nature, a spirit of order. Its returns take place every morning and every evening, after short intervals, and with exact regularity. Its influence is therefore necessarily diffused through the day, operates with an efficacy wholly peculiar, and controls with a superior authority both the mind and the life. No influence is equally felt, and no minds are equally prepared to be acted upon by influence. The method established is invested with unrivalled solemnity, enforced by the sanctity of religion, regarded with singular veneration, and submitted to without a question, even in thought. But method is the soul of all business, especially of complicated business, and peculiarly of business in which numbers are concerned. The method here produced is formed with perfect regularity, with supreme ease, without the consciousness of any difficulty, and without a thought of any resistance. Its nature is delightful; its efficacy is complete.

3. *Family worship greatly strengthens parental government.*

In the morning and evening devotion, the parent is invested with the solemn character of a priest of God, a minister of Christ. This character, eminently venerable in itself, adds in the highest degree to the personal venerableness and dignity of the parent. When we think of any object, whatever may be its nature, we necessarily associate with it those ideas which have customarily been connected with it in our minds. Children naturally regard a parent with reverence. But they cannot fail to reverence a respectable parent more, and a contemptible parent less, on account of his personal character.

Whenever they have been accustomed to behold their parent daily sustaining the office of a minister of God, they necessarily associate with every idea which they form of his person and character this solemn and important apprehension. Every image of this venerable relation presented to their minds will include in it that of a divinely appointed guardian of their spiritual concerns; a guide to their duty, given them from above; a venerated and beloved intercessor for their salvation.

At the same time, the apparent habitual piety thus exhibited, will persuade the children that the authors of their being are sincere in all their religious professions, and in their various moral instructions to them; and that they are therefore, in the evangelical sense, virtuous. The evidence furnished in this manner may be, I acknowledge, and often is, overthrown by the sinful conduct even of praying parents. But I see not how this conviction can exist, where parents do not maintain the worship of God in their families. The want of such worship presents to the eye of children a palpable and indubitable inconsistency between their conduct and their professions, which no child can fail to see, or feel. An unhappy conviction will here unavoidably spring up in their minds, which cannot be stifled, and which will necessarily lessen the character of the parent, and the weight of his commands; a conviction that these persons, notwithstanding their venerable name, and their relation to himself, are unpossessed of that singleness of heart, and that integrity of profession, which he cannot avoid regarding as indispensable.

This union in their worship, presents also in a very forcible manner to the eyes of their offspring that peculiar union of views and affections, of interests and designs, with respect to the most important of all subjects, and by necessary consequence with respect to every other, without which, it is hardly necessary to observe, no parental government can be successful; and the happy influence of which is proverbially acknowledged wherever it is found.

It is unnecessary to insist here upon the interesting nature of these subjects. It is unnecessary to shew how indispensable it is that children should entertain the most reverential thoughts concerning their parents, feel an undoubting conviction of their sincerity in all things, and realize in the strongest manner their cordial union in every valuable purpose. I shall only add therefore that, from the numerous complaints so often made by parents concerning the difficulty of governing their children, it may fairly be inferred, that all persons sustaining this character, and possessed of common understanding, must consider so efficacious an addition to their authority as of inestimable value.

4. *This worship, in an eminent degree, preserves and promotes religion in a family.*

Whenever a family or an individual observes an exact regularity in performing the duties, and celebrating the ordinances of the gospel, religion naturally becomes flourishing and vigorous in their hearts, and in their lives. From family prayers both the parents and their offspring go, happily prepared, to the devotions of the closet; and from these devotions return, with the same becoming spirit, to the worship of the house: and from the retired and affectionate services of the week, they proceed with the best preparation to the more solemn duties of the sanctuary.

To *children*, and *servants*, especially, the worship of the house is of incalculable importance. The advantages of both these classes of mankind for understanding and practising the duties of religion, in many respects, are obviously few and limited; while their minds are imperfectly fitted to make the most advantageous use of such as they enjoy. To increase their number, and their power, and certainly not to lessen either, must naturally be the wish of every benevolent man. Among these, the household worship is eminently important. Here, so soon as they are able to understand any thing, they see religion appearing daily, in one of its most affecting forms; celebrated by those whom nature teaches them most to respect

and love; and occupied about interests which they easily understand, and deeply feel. Under the happy influence of these considerations, they grow speedily into fixed habits of thinking reverentially, and believing favourably concerning religion. The very aspect of the service teaches them, that it holds the uppermost place in the mind of a parent; while a conviction of this truth renders his opinions and conduct more venerable and affecting in those of the children. In these circumstances they naturally feel as if God was always to be worshipped, sought, honoured, and praised; and that his blessing was to be implored in every concern, temporal and spiritual.

A family, habituated in this manner, goes from the house to the church with the most profitable apprehensions concerning the ordinances of the sabbath. Religion, in the view of all its members, wears a solemnity and importance, ordinarily not otherwise attainable; and a frame of mind is acquired, most happily susceptible of the best impressions in the house of God.

Thus by prayer in the family, the religion of its members, if they are religious at all, is rendered more sincere, fervent, and efficacious. They are all better beings; better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers; better children, brothers, and sisters, better masters and servants, than they otherwise would, or in the ordinary course of providence could be. All the endearing interests of families, all the strong ties, the tender relations, and the vigorous affections which grow out of this happy union of mankind in these little societies of nature, are in this manner converted into most useful means of promoting the holiness of all.

At the same time, and from the same source, children and servants are furnished with the most powerful persuasives to become holy. Family worship is a primary branch of religious education, as that education is a primary source of religion to mankind and one of the two great pillars, on which rests the salvation of men. Without family worship, religious

education will always be essentially defective; and the instructions, reproofs, and persuasives suspected, at least, if not accounted, insincere.

But holiness is the great interest of all rational beings. In itself it is happiness of the noblest kind. It is also the parent of all other happiness which is solid and enduring. On family prayer then, God has founded a great and important part of all the real good of his rational creatures in the present world.

No man can be insensible to this consideration, who is not insensible both to the present and future welfare of his offspring. Almost all parents wish their children to be virtuous here, and happy hereafter; and this, even when themselves are vicious. Family prayer is one of the chief means, among those which are placed in the hands of parents, of rendering their children the subjects of holiness, and the heirs of eternal life. The parent therefore who does not make the utmost use of this mean, always in his power, so easily employed, so obviously fitted to produce the effect, and so fraught with invaluable consequences, ought never to pretend that he has any real love for his children.

When therefore he sees them sinful, thoughtless, and dissolute, let him, instead of complaining of the difficulty which he finds in governing and reforming his children; instead of quieting himself with the belief, that they are so peculiarly froward, as to frustrate every effort, and discourage every hope, take shame and confusion of face to himself for his own guilty negligence. Let him remember, that himself is eminently the cause of their profligacy, and their ruin. Let him tremble, lest the 'fury' invoked by Jeremiah 'upon the families which called not upon the name of God,' should descend upon his own house, as the proper reward of his own irreligion.

5. *Families have the best reason to expect the blessing of God in answer to their prayers.*

All the promises, and other encouragements, given in the Scriptures to prayer, are addressed to individuals, families, and larger communities, alike. 'The

effectual fervent prayer of the righteous' as truly availeth much' in the household, as in the closet, or the church. The house is the place to ask for family blessings. Here all concerned in them unite their humble and fervent requests for the merciful communication. Nations warrantably hope for national blessings, when they join in public supplications to God. The same observation is equally applicable to all inferior societies among mankind. The members of a household are here the persons interested, the persons who hope to receive, and therefore the persons who should ask. They are unitedly to receive; their supplications therefore ought to be united. Nor is there any case in which a gracious answer to prayer may more justly be expected.

Among the disadvantages, which flow from the neglect of family prayer, may be mentioned its unhappy influence,

1. *On domestic order.*

The mind naturally opposes order; and cannot be brought to observe or relish it, unless by influence long exerted, arguments often repeated, and habits slowly and firmly established. Where these advantages do not exist in some good degree, man more resembles a wild beast, than a rational being; is impatient of all regularity, and all restraint; and is precluded alike from all worth, usefulness, and enjoyment. But no means contribute so easily, so powerfully, or so happily, to the establishment of good order in the house, as family worship. I do not deny, that this benefit flows in various degrees from other sources. But even these are prevented of no small part of their influence, where this species of prayer is neglected. They are pillars, standing on one side of the building; and incapable of supporting it; because those on the other side are taken away.

2. *On parental government.*

By this neglect all the advantages, already mentioned with reference to this subject, are lost; and all the disadvantages derived from the opposite con-

duct are incurred. An irreligious parent cannot fail to be seen by children in an unhappy light. Nor is this any fault in *them*. The most dutiful children will regard him in this manner. Irreligion is in its nature odious and contemptible ; and cannot, unless under the influence of strong habitual prejudice, fail to be seen as it is. The conscience of every child will tell him this truth, however affectionate and reverential may be his disposition.

But the parent who is thus viewed by his children, and who gives them reason to view him thus, will find his instructions, reproofs, and punishments stripped of their principal efficacy. This efficacy is chiefly dependant on the reverence with which he is regarded ; and this reverence, in a higher degree than he will probably be aware, is inseparably dependant on their apprehension, that he is a religious man. But the omission of family worship, will necessarily attach to his character, always in some degree, and usually not in a small one, the appearance of irreligion. Even in the most amiable, and in other respects unblamable men, it will prevent that full conviction in the minds of children of parental respectability, which it is so desirable that they should entertain. Even this fact will have a considerable and malignant influence upon the government and obedience of children.

3. *On the religion of a family.*

In a family where such worship does not exist, there is, it must be acknowledged, no appearance of religion. If the parent, a case which rarely happens, should be a religious man ; he is not seen to possess this character. Should he appear to sustain it in some things, he is plainly discerned not to sustain it in others ; and thus exhibits an inconsistent, vibratory course of life, on which the eye cannot rest with either conviction, or pleasure. Such a contradictory character can have little influence in doing good to the minds of children. Whatever desirable efficacy it may possess, when viewed on one side, it will impair and destroy when seen on the other.

All professions of religion, all pretensions to being religious, pass for nothing in the minds even of children, when unsupported by a religious life. But in the present case, the children behold their parent live in the continual neglect of what their consciences naturally declare to be one of the first duties of religion. Hence, whatever regard he may testify to this sacred subject; how numerous and how solemn soever his instructions to them may be, his power of making useful impressions on their minds, will in a great measure be prevented. Let it be remembered, that this prevention will be voluntary and wanton. No necessity can be pleaded for it, no advantage alleged, and no excuse found. How solemnly ought parents, who thus causelessly strip themselves, and rob their families of these inestimable benefits, to ponder this unhappy course, and to give themselves neither rest nor peace, until they shall have begun a final reformation!

The *objections* which, within my knowledge, have been alleged against family prayer, or rather which have been intended to excuse the neglect of this duty, are chiefly the following:—

1. *The want of an express injunction of it in the Scriptures.*

There is not, I acknowledge, any passage in the word of God, which in so many terms enjoins prayer in the family as a duty, in distinction from other modes of religious worship. Of him who thinks this fact an objection to the performance of this duty, I ask, will you neglect every Christian duty which you do not find enjoined in express terms? Are you prepared to go through life without dedicating your children to God in baptism? Will you refuse to observe the first day of the week as the Christian sabbath? Do you feel authorized to exclude the female sex from communion at the table of Christ? Yet in vain would you look for precepts enjoining these things in express terms.

But I deny the inference drawn by the objector from the silence of the Scriptures concerning this

subject. Not only is the general principle, that nothing is our duty which is not expressly required in the Scriptures, false ; but the application of it also, even if it were allowed to be true, is in the present case incapable of being justified. As the objection itself seems to be generally relied on more than any other, it will be useful to consider the subject of it at length, as it is exhibited in the Scriptures.

Prayer is nowhere in the Scriptures enjoined as a duty which was before unknown, and new at the time of the injunction, or as then to be begun. On the contrary, it is always spoken of as a duty already known, confessed, and practised. All the commands concerning it, respect either the times, manner, degree, spirit, universality, or some other circumstance with which the performance ought to be connected. In no instance is the duty enjoined as original, or as the subject of a new institution.

The first mention made of this subject in the Scriptures, if we adopt the common translation, is in Gen. iv. 26. Here, after the birth of Enos, it is said, that ‘ then began men to call on the name of the Lord ;’ that is, mankind then began publicly to worship God in a solemn, religious assembly. I suppose, however, that this translation is erroneous ; and believe the words ought to be rendered, ‘ then began men to be called after the name of the Lord ;’ that is, the family of Seth began to be called ‘ the sons of God ;’ in opposition to the apostate family of Cain, who were styled ‘ the children of men.’ See Gen. vi. 2.

According to this opinion, the first passage in which prayer is mentioned, is the prayer of Abraham for Ishmael, Gen. xvii. 18.

The second is his intercession for Sodom, Gen. xviii. 24.

The third is the direction, that Abraham should pray for Abimelech, after his offence in taking away Sarah. This may be considered as a command.

The fourth is the declaration, that ‘ Isaac went out into the field to pray in the evening.’ Gen. xxiv. 63.

To these may be subjoined, as next in order of time, several instances in the book of Job.

‘ Yea, thou restrainest prayer before God,’ Job xv. 4.

‘ My prayer is pure,’ Job xvi. 17.

‘ What profit shall we have, if we pray to him? (Words of the wicked), Job xvi. 15.

‘ He shall pray to God, and he will be favourable to him,’ Job xxxiii. 26.

‘ My servant Job shall pray for you:’ (A command), Job xlii. 8.

The first passage, which can be fairly construed as an injunction of prayer in the general sense, is the exhortation of the psalmist, ‘ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:’ that is, the church at large; Psal. cxlii. 6.

The second is in Jer. xxix. 7, ‘ Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it.’

In all these passages (the whole number of those in which the subject is mentioned, until after the period of the last which has been quoted), there are four instances in which prayer may be said to be commanded. In the two first, individuals are required to pray for individuals, on singular and peculiar occasions. In the third, saints are commanded, or rather exhorted, when assembled for public worship, to pray for the peace of the church. In the fourth, prayer is enjoined upon the Jewish captives, for the peace of the city whither they were to be carried. All the other passages are merely circumstantial accounts of the subject.

The first injunction of this duty, the terms of which regard it as in any sense generally obligatory, was given when the world was about three thousand years old; and the Jewish church about eight hundred. The second about two hundred years afterward.

From these facts I conclude, that it was not the intention of the Scriptures to institute this duty anew, in any passage whatever; there being no passage

in which it is thus instituted. They took up this subject in the only way which was natural or proper. Men had always prayed from the beginning, and on all occasions confessed prayer to be a duty. Nothing more therefore was necessary, natural, or proper, than to regulate it as a duty already begun, acknowledged, and practised by mankind. The state of facts demanded only, that the Scriptures should teach the manner, the times, the spirit, the constancy, and the universality of prayer. Nothing more was necessary ; and this is done in the happiest and most effectual manner conceivable.

From this account of the manner in which prayer is treated in the Scriptures, it appears evident, at least to me, that original and particular directions concerning the three divisions of this duty customarily made in modern times, viz. *secret*, *family*, and *public prayer*, ought never to have been expected. The circumstances in which the subject is taken up, and the manner in which it is exhibited, forbid every expectation of this nature. The question, whether prayer in secret, in the family, or in public, is a duty of man, was probably never asked, nor the obligation to perform it in either case doubted, during the whole period from the beginning of the world to the completion of the scriptural canon. Men always prayed on every solemn and proper occasion ; in public, in private, and in secret. When one man had wants of his own, which he wished to spread before God, or blessings which he wished to ask, he performed this duty in secret. When two, twenty, a hundred, or a thousand, had common wants, and wished for common blessings, they united in their devotions : and thus formed a greater, or smaller, religious assembly. Thus families, thus churches, and thus nations met together for social prayer and praise, as well as for the purpose of offering social sacrifices.

To this origin are to be referred the family sacrifices of Elkanah and Jesse ; and among the heathen nations the existence of household gods, and do-

domestic libations. Such gods, derived from the same source, were in all probability the teraphim, which Rachel took from Laban. Abraham's family plainly worshipped together; so did the family of Job; so did Christ and his apostles; so did the apostles after his ascension. There were little religious assemblies also in the houses of Aquila and Nymphas, consisting probably of their own households, and of such others as were occasionally present. The whole congregation of Israel also assembled at the times specified in the law of Moses, from the days of that lawgiver to the latest period of their national existence. In the same manner worshipped the Christian churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, and other places.

The truth unquestionably is, prayer was instituted by divine appointment from the creation of man, and was traditionarily spread through all nations, as a duty evident to common sense, and acknowledged by the universal voice of mankind. The Gentiles practised it in every form, as did the patriarchs, Jews, and Christians. It was performed by one, few, or many; that is, by all who were interested in the wants felt, and the blessings supplicated; and secretly, privately, or publicly, just as the occasion required.

On this scheme is the text formed: 'pray always, with all prayer;' that is, pray on every proper occasion, with prayer suited to that occasion: if the occasion be your own, with the prayer suited to it; viz. secret prayer; if your own, and that of others also, be they few or many, with prayer suited to every such occasion.

Families are always together at least twice every day; and every day furnishes at least two occasions to all the members for communion in prayer. All the members therefore are required by this precept unitedly to spread their common wants before their Maker, and to ask for blessings in which they have a common interest.

In the same manner are both secret and public

prayer enjoined. Neither of these duties is enjoined originally. All the precepts relating to them are employed in regulating the disposition with which, the manner in which, the times at which they are to be performed; or the modification, or other circumstances pertaining to the performance. Neither of these duties is any where in the Scriptures instituted anew; but both are always spoken of as already existing.

At the same time, several passages of Scripture, beside those already mentioned, refer to this subject in a manner too evident to leave a reasonable doubt, that family worship was their immediate object. When Joshua informs the children of Israel, that 'as for him and his house, they will serve the Lord; he teaches us directly, that they united, and had customarily united, in this service. The Lord's prayer, after the manner of which we are directed by Christ to pray, is a social prayer, and seems plainly to have been intended, not for an individual, not for the closet, not for the church, but for the family and the fire-side. In this prayer we are directed to ask for our daily bread, on the day in which the prayer is used. As therefore we need, and are bound to ask for, our daily bread every day, it was plainly designed to be a daily prayer, and could not therefore be intended for the church; since mankind are not, and cannot be, present in the church every day. That it was not intended for the closet, is obvious from the fact, that it is addressed to God by more persons than one. That it may with propriety be used both in the church, and in the closet, as to its substance, I readily acknowledge. but it was, I think, plainly intended principally for the household. 'What a live coal,' says Dr. Hunter beautifully, 'is applied to devotion, when the solitary *my* Father and *my* God, is changed into the social *our* Father, and *our* God!' How delightful, let me add, how interesting, how animating, how encouraging to every amiable and virtuous emotion, for the pair, thus united, to be able to say, and ac-

ually to say 'Behold, here are we, and the children whom thou hast given us!'

In Zechariah x. 10, the prophet informs us, that, as a commencement of the millennial glory and happiness, the people of Israel shall worship God with peculiar earnestness and devotion, as it is expressed in the Hebrew, 'families by families.' In other words, he teaches us, that there shall be a wonderful prevalence of family worship. This also he exhibits as followed by remarkable testimonies of the divine favour, and as crowned with blessings new in their degree, and eminently glorious in their nature. It is difficult to conceive how God could testify in a more affecting manner the peculiar favour with which he regards family religion.

2. *Diffidence and timidity are often alleged as serious objections to the performance of this duty.*

This certainly is a very unhappy excuse for neglecting this duty, and very unfortunately alleged. I should feel myself bound to ask the author of it, Are you too diffident to perform your customary business? Are you too diffident to pursue customary amusements? Are you too diffident to commit sin? Does the bashfulness, which hinders you from family prayer, hinder you also from censuring, and laughing at others who practise it? Does it prevent you from using the language of profaneness? Why should you be timid only concerning the duties of religion? Is there any thing in the nature of this subject, which can reasonably excite shame, or which can fairly excuse you in indulging it? Is it not true, that religion itself is the thing of which you are ashamed?

Remember, I beseech you, the awful declaration of Christ concerning this subject, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his glory.' Family worship, presented in the name of Christ, is as real a confession of this divine Person, as the participation of the sacramental supper.

3. *Inability to pray, to devise proper thoughts, and*

to find proper expressions, is also no unfrequent objection against the performance of this duty.

To him, who alleges it, I would say, Have you not wants to be supplied, woes to be relieved, sins to be forgiven, and blessings to be supplicated? Can you not confess your sins, recite your wants and distresses, and mention the blessings which you need? Do you ordinarily find any difficulty in conferring with an earthly friend, or in soliciting aid from an earthly benefactor? Have you, when in earnest, ever found any serious embarrassment in telling others what **you** needed, or what you desired?

Wherever religion gains possession of the heart, regular experience **proves**, that all these difficulties vanish. Nay, where serious conviction of guilt and danger is entertained by the mind, every man who is the subject of it forgets at once both his inability and bashfulness. Is it not evident, then, that the true reason why these things have such unhappy influence over you is, that you have no proper regard for religion, and no just sense either of your guilt, or your need of forgiveness?

At the same time, these difficulties are incomparably more formidable in prospect, than in reality. As you approach them, they vanish. Thousands and millions, originally neither wiser nor better than you, neither less timid nor less embarrassed, have got over them all. Certainly then you may achieve the same victory.

4. *Multitudes allege also, as a serious objection to the performance of this duty, that they shall meet from their families nothing but opposition, censure, and ridicule.*

To the author of this objection I shall answer, that it is usually, if not always, founded in mistake. Children are by nature prepared to reverence religion. The conscience of man, before it has been warped and overpowered by passion, prejudice, and sin, prompts him, of course, to regard this solemn and awful object only with emotions of respect. So obvious is this truth, that it has often been acknowledged by infidels. Children therefore present no

obstruction to the performance of this duty.

Whatever may be true of other countries, it is certainly true in this, that the number of women is extremely small who discourage, in any manner which may be styled direct, the ordinances of religion. From them therefore no hindrance will be presented to this duty, unless in cases of a very extraordinary nature. The difficulty then which is here alleged is, in almost every case, created solely by the man himself.

I would farther ask this objector, Have you made the experiment? If not, where is your proof of its truth? If you have, have you attempted to remove it; and, like a wise and good man, determined to govern your family, and subdue so unreasonable a spirit?

This evil is oftener feared than felt. It is doubtful whether the man can be found, who, after a faithful trial, has been prevented by it from the regular worship of God in his family.

There is another objection, which, though perhaps never alleged in form, has had no small weight in particular cases. It is this: The persons in question have long neglected it, and feel extreme reluctance to exhibit to their families their inconsistency of character. Concerning this objection I shall only observe, that it lies equally against all reformation; and, if yielded to, would effectually prevent every sinner from becoming a Christian.

Upon the whole, all these objections are either erroneous, or nugatory; either devised, or adopted, by a mind already willing to neglect the duty; and fastened upon, as the best means within its reach, to quiet its own conscience, and to justify its conduct in the sight of others.

SERMON CXLII.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE USEFULNESS OF PRAYER TO COMMUNITIES.—

ITS EFFICACY IN PROCURING BLESSINGS.—

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO PRAYER.

It is good for me to draw near unto God.--PSAL. lxxiii. 28.

IN the last Discourse, I considered *the usefulness of prayer to families*. The next thing proposed for discussion was *its usefulness to communities*.

It may be proper to remind my audience, that the usefulness of prayer was originally mentioned as *two-fold*; consisting,

1. *In its immediate influence on the suppliant*; and,
2. *Its efficacy in procuring blessings*.

It may be proper farther to observe, that, next to the usefulness of prayer, I proposed to examine *the encouragements to this duty*. These three subjects will be considered in the present Discourse.

In the text, the psalmist declares, that 'it was good for him to draw near to God.' If it was good, that is, profitable, for the psalmist to perform this duty; it must, without a question, be equally profitable to every other individual, who prays with the same spirit. There was nothing in the character of David which rendered prayer more beneficial to him, than it may be to others. He prayed frequently, faithfully, and earnestly. All who pray in the same manner will find the same benefits. Nor will this usefulness be, in any degree, lessened by the communion of *multitudes* in this solemn service. On the contrary, it will be increased. The power of sympathy cannot fail to enhance the fervour of prayer, when offered up to God by numerous bodies of mankind. Whatever advantages then result from prayer, generally considered, whether offered up in the closet, or

in the family, all these will result from the prayer of communities. Beside these, public prayer is accompanied by several advantages, in a great measure peculiar to itself. Particularly,

1. *Public worship is in a prime degree constituted of public prayer.*

The benefits of public worship I have considered at large in a former Discourse. All these benefits are not, I confess, derived solely from public prayer. They are, however, so connected with it, as, in a remote sense, to be justly attributable to its proper influence. It seems scarcely probable, that without public prayer the other ordinances of public worship would be celebrated at all, or the sabbath itself at all observed. If we did not feel our dependance upon God for all good, and the absolute necessity of deriving, and asking it from him, there would, apparently, be no motives of sufficient efficacy to preserve public worship in the world. If public prayer were to cease, the sabbath, it is to be feared, would be forgotten, and the sanctuary deserted.

These things being admitted, it follows, that all the blessings above-mentioned are derived from public prayer; not, indeed, immediately, but ultimately. On their importance I need not now expatiate.

2. *Public prayer, above all things, preserves alive sense of national dependance on God.*

The prime mean of preserving in the mind of an individual a sense of his own dependance on his Maker is, confessedly, prayer; as has been shewn at large in a preceding Discourse. On families and on nations its influence is the same. No human emotion has a more advantageous influence on the mind than this. It affects men deeply in all stations and circumstances; and affects them all happily. It is a feeling perfectly just, and the only just feeling respecting the subject. It is a feeling of high importance; it is a feeling of the most useful tendency.

On rulers its influence is that, and only that which they need, to incline them to 'rule justly and in the fear of God.' A ruler who feels his dependance on

his Maker will be just, of course ; because he knows that God is just, and demands exact justice of him because he knows that God is an eye witness of all his conduct ; and because he knows he must give an account of that conduct, and be rewarded according to its nature. If he does that which is right ; he is assured of acceptance ; if not, sin, he is equally assured, will lie at his door.

With such a sense of his dependance, a ruler will be *merciful* also ; because he knows that God is merciful ; that he loves those who are merciful, and requires mercy of all men, and peculiarly of rulers ; because he knows, that ‘ mercy and truth uphold the throne of a king,’ and the office of every other ruler : and because he knows that, in the end, he himself will infinitely need mercy ; that God has pronounced the merciful, blessed, and promised that ‘ they shall obtain mercy,’ and has awfully declared, that ‘ he shall have judgment without mercy, who sheweth no mercy.’

With this sense of dependance also, a ruler will be *humble*. In the sight of God every man, however high his station, however extensive his power, is merely a ‘ worm of the dust, and crushed before the moth.’ To a being so frail, so feeble, so dependant, pride cannot belong. His own littleness cannot fail to stare him in the face, whenever he remembers that every thing which he has, or is, or will be, has been, and must be, solely derived from God ; and for its continuance must depend solely on his pleasure. It is impossible for a mind fraught with these sentiments not to forget the haughtiness of power, and the splendour of station. At the same time, a ruler thus disposed will ever call to mind, that the poor in spirit, the meek, and the humble, are the only persons to whom good is promised in the gospel. ‘ The naughtiness of man,’ it is there declared, ‘ shall be brought low, and the pride of all human glory shall be stained.’ It is there declared, that every proud man is ‘ an abomination to the Lord,’ and shall be stubble for the final day.

It is scarcely necessary to observe, how important these attributes are to every ruler, or how beneficial they invariably prove to subjects. With such a character, the ruler cannot fail to be equitable in his laws and administrations, reasonable in his exaction and management of public property, clement in the distribution of justice, conscientious in the performance of every duty, and universally 'a minister of God for good' to his people.

A corresponding influence, equally happy, will the same sense of dependance have on those who are ruled. The same general conscientiousness will prevail in their minds; a scrupulous obedience to all laws, and lawful authority; and a steady attachment to the good order and peace secured by a wise administration.

Men formed to sentiments and habits of this nature are almost wholly a different kind of beings, from those to whom such sentiments are unknown. The motives by which these two classes of men are governed are totally diverse. Those of the former class are swayed by the fear and love of God, a disposition to obey him, the dictates of conscience, the hope of final approbation, and the dread of final ruin. Those of the latter class are influenced only by present, selfish considerations; and universally inquire how much they shall gain by submission to government, or how much they shall lose by revolt. The former obey rulers, are just and kind to each other, and perform all the duties owed to their fellow-men, from conscience and principle. The latter, so far as they perform these duties at all, perform them from convenience only. On the former class, full reliance may be uniformly placed. To the latter no confidence can safely attach, except when their duty and their selfishness coincide. The obedience of the former is voluntary, that of the latter mercenary and venal.

Between rulers and subjects, governed by this sense of dependance on their Maker, arises of course a universal confidence. In a country thus influ

enced, the government can therefore easily, and will naturally, be mild and gentle. In every other, it must ultimately be a system of coercion, an administration of force. Society in such a country is established on sounder principles, is formed with juster views, and assumes a nobler character. It is the society of reason, of friendship, of virtue, of piety. Every thing in the understanding, the heart, and the life, is more accordant with the commands of God, and therefore with truth and rectitude. The bonds which bind the society together are stronger, the trespasses against human happiness are fewer and less atrocious, the punishments inflicted by the magistrate are milder, and more rare; and the safety, comfort, and prosperity enjoyed are more absolute, uniform, and entire.

Of all these blessings, prayer, both public and private, is in such a sense the source, that without it they never existed in this corrupt world, and never will exist. Nor will their extent ever fail to be proportioned to the prevalence of this duty.

I have now finished the observations which I intended concerning *the usefulness of prayer, by its proper influence on the suppliant*. The next subject which demands our attention, according to the plan proposed, is *its efficacy in procuring blessings from God*.

Every considerate man will see infinite motives inviting him to pray, when he discerns that prayer will of course make him a wiser and better man, recommend him to the approbation and favour of God, and prepare him to receive blessings from his hands; when he perceives, that in praying he has become obedient to a high and solemn command, and more attuned to the spirit and character of heaven. These are the most estimable of all blessings; and as they are blessings of such import in themselves, and extend throughout eternity, their value, it is plain, cannot be measured.

But to many minds, *the hope of being actually answered, and directly blessed with good of some extraneous kind, not inwrought in the present character, and dis-*

tant from personal improvement and distant fruition, is usually a still more powerful persuasive to prayer. Some persons would be moved by this consideration, who would imperfectly feel the other great and obvious as it appears. It is also a consideration founded in truth and reality; and for both reasons merits a place in this system of discourses.

If I am not deceived, the following observations will place it in a convincing light.

1. *From the influence which prayer has naturally on the suppliant, there is no small probability, that God will grant blessings in answer to the petitions of those who faithfully perform this duty.*

From the observations made in a former discourse concerning the influence which prayer has on the suppliant, it is evident, that by the faithful performance of this duty, he is in all respects made a fitter recipient of blessings, than he can be otherwise. No rational doubt can be entertained, that God will bestow his blessings on such as are thus fitted to receive them, rather than on such as are not. It is evidently proper, that he should regard with compassion and kindness, and that he should communicate good to those who felt their dependance on him, acknowledged his sufficiency, and disposition to supply their wants, humbly besought his mercy, realized their own undeserving character, and were grateful to him for every blessing which they received; when with equal propriety he would refuse the same blessings to men who felt no dependance but on themselves; who were too indifferent, too lazy, or too proud to ask; who questioned his right to require, and their own obligation to perform this duty; or who were too ungrateful to acknowledge their own indebtedness to him for the mercies which they received, or his goodness in bestowing them. Were God to pursue any other course of administration, it is difficult to conceive how he could act as a moral governor, and secure, without coercion, the obedience of his subjects.

2. *The instances are numerous, in which blessings are*

actually given in answer to prayer.

I am well aware of the objection which lies against this doctrine. It may, I am sensible, be always said in reply, that we know not whether the same blessings would not have descended, if prayers had not been offered up for them. Without the aid of revelation, I acknowledge, this cannot be known with certainty; since he who gives blessings, is the only being who originally knows the reason for which he gives them. Still, from the course of providence merely, the probability is strong, that the blessings in question are given only in answer to prayer. In support of this assertion I observe, that blessings have in many instances been given, after fervent prayers have ascended to God, when none but God could have contributed to their existence; when they were utterly ~~un~~attainable by any human efforts; after all such efforts had been made without success; after all hope of obtaining them, except by prayer, had vanished; and when, 'Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man,' had become the only language seriously thought of by those who were concerned. Of such instances I could easily mention a considerable number. Many more, there is every reason to believe, are remarked by every observing, religious man. Many more still would, I doubt not, have been remarked, if religious men were more observant, and prayer were more continually and faithfully performed.

It will be said still, that even these blessings might have been given, had they not been supplicated. To this suggestion of possibility the proper answer is, 'They might not.' We know they were not given without prayer; and have not a shadow of reason to conclude that, if they had not been prayed for, they would ever have been given. The suggestion therefore is useless to the purpose for which it is made.

But the complete proof lies in this; that certain blessings are not given to men who do not pray, and those, blessings of the highest importance. Such

are peace of conscience, 'joy in the Holy Ghost,' the 'hope' which 'maketh not ashamed,' increase of grace, and final perseverance in piety. These are the best of all blessings; and these are never found by those who do not pray. They are also blessings which none but God can give. As therefore they are given to those only who pray, so they are plainly given as an answer to prayer.

At the same time, I am bound, as an inhabitant of New England, solemnly to declare, that were there no other instances to be found in any other country, the blessings communicated to this would furnish ample satisfaction concerning this subject to every sober, much more to every pious man. Among these, *the destruction of the French armament under the Duke D'Anville, in the year 1746*, ought to be remembered with gratitude and admiration by every inhabitant of this country. This fleet consisted of forty ships of war; was destined for the destruction of New England; was of sufficient force to render that destruction, in the ordinary progress of things, certain; sailed from Chebucto, in Nova-Scotia, for this purpose; and was entirely destroyed on the night following a general fast throughout New England, by a terrible tempest. Impious men, who 'regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands,' and who for that reason are finally destroyed, may refuse to give God the glory of this most merciful interposition. But our ancestors had, and it is to be hoped their descendants ever will have, both piety and good sense sufficient to 'ascribe to Jehovah the greatness, and the power, and the victory, and the majesty;' and to 'bless the Lord God of Israel for ever and ever.'

3. *The Scriptures put this subject out of doubt, by declaring directly, that blessings are given to mankind in answer to prayer.*

To prevent any misapprehension concerning the views now to be exhibited of this subject, I observe, that I do not consider prayer as meriting in any case the blessings which are given to the suppliant. **AN**

blessings are bestowed upon man by the unmerited mercy of God ; as is unanswerably evident from the fact, that men universally are sinners, and deserve of course nothing but punishment.

Nor do I intend, that the prayers of men change at all the views, dispositions, or purpose of God. 'The Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, is without variableness, or shadow of turning.' No suppliant therefore is encouraged to pray by an expectation, or a possibility of producing the least change in the glorious object of his prayers.

But I intend, that prayer is in this sense the means of procuring blessings ; viz. *that without prayer the blessings would never be obtained.*

In the immutable counsels of God it is established, that there shall be an inseparable connexion between humble, faithful prayer, and the blessings needed by the suppliant. Prayer is therefore as regular, nay, more regular, a cause of blessings, than ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, are of the harvest.

In support of this position, I shall now allege several passages of Scripture, sufficient in my view to establish the doctrine beyond reasonable debate.

The only condition upon which mankind receive any blessings, is given us by our Saviour in that remarkable passage : 'Ask, and ye shall receive ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' As asking is here made the condition of receiving ; it is plain, that if we perform not this condition, we are assured that we shall not receive.

Again : 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, that whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,' John xvi. 23. Here the promise is unlimited, as to the good which is asked ; and absolute, as to the certainty of receiving it. More cannot be expressed, nor desired. Again : 'Whatso-

ever we ask, we receive of him,' 1 John iii. 22. Quotations of this nature need not be multiplied.

As proof that prayer is not offered up in vain, I allege Isa. xlv. 19 : ' I said not to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.' In this passage God declares that it was no part of his declarations to Israel, that they sought him, or prayed to him, in vain. Of consequence, it was no part of his counsels with respect to that people. But the counsels of God towards his people, in the different ages of the world, are in substance the same. It is now as true as it was when this prophecy was uttered, that they never seek, that they never pray, in vain.

The prevailing power of prayer is directly as well as strongly asserted by St. James ; ' The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.'

' Is any sick,' says the same apostle, ' let him call for the elders of the church ; and let them pray over him. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick ; and the Lord shall raise him up ; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.'

To illustrate all these declarations, St. James adduces the example of Elijah ; who, although a frail man, like others, ' prayed earnestly, that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.' These great effects, it is to be remembered, were consequences of the prayers of a single man.

After the glorious prediction communicated to Ezekiel concerning the return of the Jews to their own land in the latter days, a prediction delivered in absolute terms by God himself, the same great Being declares, ' Yet for all this will I be inquired of,' that is, prayed to, ' by the house of Israel, to do it for them.' Absolute as the promises of these vast blessings were, still the blessings were to be given only in answer to the prayers of the recipients.

Among the divine promises concerning the millennial happiness, this is a remarkable one : ' My

house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.' From this great fact will arise inseparably the happiness itself. Without such a universal spirit of prayer as is here predicted, the peculiar blessings of that singular period would never exist ; for then as in all preceding periods, the only ordinance of God concerning this subject will be, ' Ask, and ye shall receive.'

From all these passages it is, I think, unanswerably evident, that prayer is entirely efficacious to procure blessings from God.

It ought here to be farther observed, that we are not to expect any thing in answer to our prayers which is not agreeable to the will of God. Nor ought we to wish any thing which is not of this nature to be given to us ; for nothing else will prove a blessing. Whatever is right and proper to be done, is a part of the divine will,

Nor ought we to expect the very same kinds or measures of good for which we pray. Often these would not be good for us ; or if good for us at all, they would not be so at the times, and in the manner in which we ask for them. Good will always be given in answer to our prayers ; but it will be real good, such as God sees to be good, and not such as we erroneously may imagine to be of this nature.

REMARKS.

1. *All persons have abundant encouragement to pray to God.*

This was originally proposed as a distinct head of discourse. I have chosen to introduce it in this form, because it grows so naturally out of the two preceding heads ; and because it has of necessity been anticipated in the consideration of them. The *usefulness* of prayer by its own proper *influence*, and by its *efficacy* in procuring blessings from God, are *prime encouragements* to the performance of this duty.

The certain prospect of becoming better, wiser, more lovely in the sight of God, and more fitted to receive blessings from his hands, and of actually

gaining the blessings by known, limited, and easy efforts, is a combination of the highest and noblest motives which can influence a rational being. To every suppliant these motives are continually presented. They are presented by God himself; they are established by his undeceiving declarations; they are obvious to our own reason; they are therefore real, and ought plainly to have their full influence on every reasoning mind. The good in view is the greatest good. Nay, there is no other real good. It is good in certain reversion for every suppliant.

In support of this scheme may be alleged, as full evidence, the numerous examples in which these great consequences of prayer have actually existed; examples, faithfully recorded in the Scriptures for our encouragement in this duty.

Abimelech received an entire deliverance from the distresses in which his family were involved, as an answer to the prayer of Abraham.

As an answer to the prayers of Abraham, also, God assured him, that, if ten righteous men should be found in the cities of the plain, he would spare those cities, and not consign them to the punishment which their sins had so eminently deserved.

In answer to the prayer of Job, God forgave the sin and folly of his three friends, in not speaking of him the thing which was right.

At the prayer of Moses, the Israelites were not only delivered from many other evils, but preserved also from utter extinction.

At the prayer of Gideon, the dew fell on the ground, and not on the fleece; and again on the fleece, and not on the ground; that he might know the will of God, and be satisfied that he acted under a divine commission.

At the prayer of Samuel, the Lord thundered on the army of the Philistines, and wrought a great salvation for Israel.

At the prayer of Hezekiah, his life was lengthened fifteen years.

In answer to the prayer of Daniel, Gabriel was sent from the highest heavens, to explain the wonderful and distressing vision, disclosed to him concerning future times.

As an answer to the prayers of Cornelius, an angel was sent to direct him to send for Peter, who should 'teach him words, whereby he, and all his house, should be saved.'

The apostles lived on prayer; and received continually many great and wonderful blessings, as immediate answers to their prayers.

To these, and other examples of the same nature recorded in the Scriptures, may be added the commands, parables, and promises, which every where enjoin, explain, and enforce this great duty.

To all these things may also be added the perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ, 'who in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death; and was heard in that he feared:' or, as the Greek may well be rendered, 'on account of his piety.' This example unites all motives. It is a perfect pattern to us, as being perfectly conformed to the will of God. It is a clear proof, that no being in a dependant state, however excellent, is exempted from this duty, or from the universal law of God's providence, which connects blessings only with prayer. If God would have blessed any being without prayer, he certainly would have blessed Christ. As certainly, Christ, had such been the fact, would not have prayed, since his prayers in that case would have been a vain and useless service. The will of his Father he certainly knew; and prayed only because it was agreeable to his will. Accordingly, his prayers were heard, and always heard. This example also has the entire force of a command, and is invested with divine authority. If, then, we obey and follow him in this great duty, we shall do that which is right in the sight of God, as he did; shall be accepted for his sake, as he was accepted, and shall be rewarded and blessed as he was.

In these things, thus combined, there is plainly all possible encouragement to pray, and to 'continue steadfast in prayer.' 'The Father of all mercies' regards us in this situation as his children; prepares us by this duty most happily to realize his character as 'the giver of every good and perfect gift;' and fits us in the best manner also to receive his blessings, when they are bestowed. He forms us to the spirit and conduct of children; and is himself ready to give good things of all kinds to us, when we thus ask him. In our petitions we learn the nature and value of his blessings, our own absolute need of them, and his unspeakable goodness in furnishing them for our enjoyment. We learn to depend on him, to trust in him, and to exercise towards him unceasing love, reverence, gratitude, and praise. At the same time we are assured, that we shall never ask in vain.

2. *From these considerations I urge, anew, the folly and sin of those who neglect prayer.*

Prayer is the avenue to all good, temporal and eternal, and to us the only avenue. He who will not pray therefore shuts up the only passage which has been opened for him by God to the attainment of happiness. It may be alleged here, but it will be alleged to no purpose, that multitudes who do not pray are as prosperous as those who do. *An ox is pampered, but it is only for the slaughter.* The enjoyments of this life are never blessings to him that does not pray. If they are merely means of luxury, hardness of heart, and grossness of life, he who enjoys them will only 'treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.' On the part of God, indeed, they are always kindly given; but on the part of the recipient, they are regularly abused, by being made incentives to sin. They are therefore curses to him by his own perversion; and are styled blessings, only by an abuse of language.

Without prayer there is no virtue, no piety, no obedience to God. The commencement of piety in Saul of Tarsus was thus announced by the Holy Ghost, 'Behold, he prayeth!' But without piety

there is no blessing reserved for man. He may indeed be rich, and great, and luxurious; 'may be clothed in purple and fine linen; and may fare sumptuously every day.' Such was the condition of the rich man in the parable. But at the end of a short life, 'he lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment;' and found, that he had received all his good things in this life.

What excuse then can be devised for the neglect of prayer? Is it a hard service? Be it so. Is not the reward sufficiently great to retribute the toil? Good in hand, of every kind which is real and desirable, and good to come, inestimable and endless, are certainly deserving of any labour or suffering which men can undergo. However severe may be the labour of performing the duty, the compensation is certainly ample and complete.

But is it more severe than the daily toil of laborious men? This you yourselves see cheerfully undergone, merely for the common gains of avarice, by millions who do not and cannot know, that those gains will be good at all. To every sincere suppliant 'all things work together for good.' How vast the difference in these rewards!

Is it harder than profane swearing and cursing? In them, as in prayer, all the labour which exists, exists only in the utterance of words: and multitudes in these evil practices expend much more time and breath than is demanded in prayer. All these also 'labour in vain, and spend their strength for nought.' Nay, what is infinitely worse, they labour only to be 'poor, and wretched, and miserable.'

But is it hard at all? Is it a hard condition, for the attainment of all good, to ask it; and, above all things, to ask it of the infinitely blessed and bountiful God?

It has been, and undoubtedly will be again, objected by multitudes, some of them probably in this audience, that they cannot pray. Let me ask those who make this objection. Have you tried?—tried, I mean, in earnest. You will be obliged to answer in

the negative. You have never seriously attempted to perform this duty. Whence then do you know that you cannot pray? How do you know that God will not willingly do for you whatever you find it impossible or difficult to do for yourselves? He is infinitely willing to give, in answer to your prayers. Whence have you learned, that he is not equally willing to befriend you in your attempts to pray?

The truth is, you do not choose to make such attempts. You have wants endlessly numerous, and incalculably important. They might be supplied; but you will not ask God to supply them. You have souls of infinite value. They might be saved; but you will not ask God to save them. You are sinners, and exposed to perdition. From these tremendous evils you might be delivered; but will not ask God to deliver you. You are made candidates for heaven; and might be received into that glorious world of everlasting joy. Rather than pray, you choose to perish.

All blessings are opened for your enjoyment. The condition, on which you may obtain them all, is to ask. No sacrifice, expense, or loss, is demanded of you. None will be incurred. On the contrary, praying is in itself unspeakable gain, and solid pleasure; higher, more rational, more unmingled pleasure, than you ever found, or ever will find in sin. The condition therefore is a gainful condition of a reward without bounds, and without end. What then is your conduct, but supreme and unmingled folly?

‘Fools,’ saith Solomon, ‘despise wisdom and instruction, and hate knowledge.’ This wisdom, of supreme import, has been taught to you a thousand times. Hitherto you have despised and hated it. The evil of neglecting prayer has been often urged on you; but hitherto it has been urged in vain. Hitherto you have deceived yourselves with the folly of believing that God will bless you, while you refuse to pray to him; in other words, that he will bless you in direct contradiction to his own express declarations. What specimen of folly can be greater? That you

should be thus deceived with your present character is not strange; since the Scriptures inform us, that it is the nature of *folly* to be *deceitful*. That you should think yourselves right in these views, and in the conduct which grows out of them, is as little strange; for persons of this character, according to the same divine testimony, usually *think themselves right*. But let me remind you from the same sacred book, that ‘fools die for want of wisdom.’ In your present course, you are in the road to death. For want of wisdom only do you continue in it a single day. Should the same folly be prolonged, the period is not distant when you will die for ever!

SERMON CXLIII.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

THE OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER CONSIDERED.

What is the Almighty that we should serve him; and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?—
 JOB xxi. 15.

THE five first subjects, originally proposed as themes of discourse concerning the duty of prayer, have been examined at length in the four preceding Sermons. The sixth, viz. *objections against this duty*, will now occupy our attention.

In the text, a general objection is made against all obedience to God, and is professedly founded on his character. ‘What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?’—There is nothing in the character of God, nor in our relation to him, which requires our obedience to his will. We are neither obliged by any duty, nor drawn by any interest, to his service. This impious sentiment is exhibited in the context as the sentiment of abandoned men only; and is plainly of a nature too impious to be uttered by any other.

The following one, proceeding from the same mouth also, is with perfect propriety exhibited to us as resulting from the same spirit. Yet there are multitudes, who are far from deserving the character of profligacy, who yet say concerning God, 'What profit shall we have, if we pray to him?' This objection, it will be observed, is a *universal* one. 'What profit shall we have?'—that is, we shall not be profited at all, either in our minds, or in our circumstances. We shall not be profited by the proper influence of prayer on ourselves, nor by its efficacy in procuring blessings from God. All objections against prayer may be justly regarded as being summed up in this single question.

It cannot however, be expected, that on this occasion every objection which an irreligious mind can devise against this duty, will be taken up, and refuted. Several such objections have been anticipated in the preceding Discourses. Of such as remain, I shall examine those only which may be supposed to have some real weight in the mind of a sober man. These, so far as I recollect the , respect the *predetermination, immutability, knowledge, and wisdom of God*; and, *the supposed vanity and presumption of prayer*.

I shall consider them in their order.

The two first of these subjects are commonly united in the scheme of the objector; and may therefore with propriety be here considered together. If God be a *changeable* being, although he may have predetermined all things, yet he may be supposed to alter his plans, in consequence of requests presented to him by his intelligent creatures; and may therefore be addressed as a changeable being. On the other hand, if God be *immutable*, and yet have formed no system of things in his own mind; he may perhaps constitute his designs, from time to time, with some degree of conformity to their supplications.

The first objection which I shall mention, and which is derived from these sources, is usually stated

in terms like the following :—

‘ Prayer is fruitless, or, in the language of the text, unprofitable, because all things are determined from everlasting by an immutable God, and will therefore take place according to his determination. Hence our prayers, making no alteration in any thing, must be an idle, perhaps an impious service idle, because they can affect nothing ; impious, because they are expressions of our desires for blessings, which God has not chosen to give. If God has determined to give us these blessings, we shall receive them without prayer. If he has determined not to give them, we shall not receive them, however fervently we may pray. So far then as we pray for things which God has determined to give our prayers are useless. So far as we pray for those which he has determined not to give, our prayers are directly opposed to his pleasure.’

I have endeavoured to state this objection at full length, because I wish to present it with all the force which it has, or can have, in the mind of the objector. To the several things contained in it, I answer,

1. *There cannot possibly be any impiety in prayer, offered up in the manner stated in these Discourses.*

The original definition which I gave of prayer, and with which all the subsequent accounts of it have accorded, is that of the Westminster Assembly of Divines ; That ‘ prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to his will.’ To desire that, and that only, which is agreeable to the will of God, cannot be impious. Evangelical prayer supposes, in its very nature, that we ask either for those things for which the Scriptures have expressly permitted us to pray ; or for those which we professedly submit to his will in our petitions. In this conduct impiety cannot exist. On the contrary, no human being was ever the subject of piety who did not pursue this conduct.

The objection is now reduced to a single article ; viz. *The fruitfulness of prayer ; or its inefficacy to*

change the purposes of God, and therefore to procure blessings. To this I answer,

2. *This objection lies, with exactly the same force, against every other human effort, as against prayer.*

If the predetermination and immutability of God render it improper for men to pray, because their prayers cannot change his purposes; then the same things must render it equally improper for men to plough, sow, reap, or make any other effort for any end whatever. All these, without the divine blessing, will be in vain; and can no more change the purpose of God than prayer. With just the same propriety and force may *the farmer* say, 'It is in vain for me to plough, or sow, or reap: since, if God has determined to give me a crop, I shall have it without either of these efforts. On the contrary, if he has determined not to give me a crop, I shall not have it, however faithfully I may labour. My ploughing, sowing, and reaping, therefore, must be all idle, because they will all be fruitless.'

In the same manner may *the student* say, 'If God has determined that I should possess learning, I shall possess it without study; but if he has determined that I shall not possess learning, I shall not acquire it, although I study with ever so much diligence.'

In the same manner may every man say concerning his exertions.

This reasoning, were we governed by it, would plainly put an end to all human exertions at once and we should neither plough, nor build, nor collect food, or fuel; nor teach, nor study, nor make any other attempt to promote the good, either of ourselves or others. Conclusions, so evidently false as these, and so fraught with necessary mischief, cannot flow from sound principles. Safely, therefore, may we pronounce the proofs by which they are professedly established, to be hollow and deceitful.

3. *There is a radical and gross error in this objection; viz. that God has predetermined the end, and not the means.*

This opinion is equally contradictory to the Scrip

tures, and to common sense. St. Paul, a little before his shipwreck, was informed by an angel, that God had 'given him all them that sailed with him.' Yet afterward, when 'the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship; when they had let down the boat into the sea; Paul said to the centurion, and the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved,' Acts xxvii. 22, 30, 31. The end here determined was, the preservation of the ship's company. The means indispensable to the end, were the continuance of the seamen in the ship, and their exertions to bring it to land. These were predetermined equally with the end, and were absolutely necessary to its existence. Equally necessary are ploughing and sowing, rain and sunshine, to the existence of a crop; studying to the acquisition of knowledge; and all other efforts of men, to the purposes which they actually accomplish. All these are equally predetermined with the ends accomplished, and equally parts of the divine system.

Another error is involved also in the same objection; viz. that God bestows blessings upon mankind which are not given in answer to prayer. Of such a determination there is not, and there cannot be any evidence. The Scriptures decisively teach us, that the only condition of *receiving* is *asking*. Prayer therefore, as means to the end, that is, the reception of blessings, is itself a part, and an inseparable part of the predetermined plan of God. When any man considers how useful prayer is to form us into a fitness for the reception of blessings, he will easily discern one great and solid reason of this divine constitution of things.

There is no moral subject concerning which mankind appear to have fallen into more and greater errors than concerning this. The character of God, with respect to both these subjects, is undoubtedly far removed in many particulars above our comprehension. In several others, it seems to be capable of a satisfactory illustration to a sober mind, not unwilling to be satisfied. Nothing is more certain,

than that, if God ever was, is, or will be, the subject of any determinations, he must have formed them from eternity. In him 'there is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning.' Of course, he can never be the subject of any new determinations. He can have no new ideas, thoughts, or views. 'All his works were known to him from the beginning.' This is certain even to reason; for all his works were contrived by him, and therefore were unquestionably known. Hence, no being and no event can be any thing but what he contrived and knew. As he is perfectly the same; as the being and the event in each case is also invariably the same as when originally contemplated by him; whatever choice or preference he originally experienced, must for ever be his invariable choice or preference. If therefore he did not originally determine, choose, or prefer, he certainly never will.

Farther: The existence of God is one unvarying present existence; and his duration an eternal *now*, without past or future; nearer in its nature to one indivisible moment of our existence, than to any thing else which we experience or know. He literally 'inhabits eternity,' or fills it all at once; just as he fills immensity at once, and not successively its several parts. When therefore we say, that God predetermined all things, it is as true, in the metaphysical sense, that he determines them after, as before their existence. In strict truth, there is no proper comparison between our successive being, and the unchanging existence of God. One thing only is present to us at any present time. Every thing and every time is absolutely present to God. His creation and providence, together with all their beings and events, are always before *his* view, as a picture containing many images is present before *ours*.

Every part of God's predetermination is founded on exactly the same reasons with those on which the same determination would be founded, if all beings and events had already existed; and God, in possession of the same omniscience, should then survey

them with a perfect discernment of their natures and relations, from his own determinations concerning them, and pronounce, with respect to every one, his unerring judgment. Of course, his predeterminations are exactly the same with such determinations as would exist in his mind, after every thing had taken place ; and are all exactly just and right ; such as perfect wisdom and goodness, understanding them entirely, would dictate and approve.

Nor is the *immutability* of God at all more liable to objections. God from everlasting was exactly what all beings ought to wish him to be ; possessed of every excellence in an infinite degree, and the subject of no imperfection either natural or moral. He knows, and ever knew, all things, both actual and possible. He can do all things ; and is infinitely disposed to do every thing, and that only, which is absolutely right and good. Consequently, there is nothing, there never has been, there never will be any thing which, considered merely as a work of God, is not exactly right. In that vast kingdom, which fills immensity and eternity, there will never exist a single being or event, which perfect wisdom and goodness could wish not to have existed.

Who can rationally desire a change in such a character as this ? What would the change be ? A change from perfection to imperfection ; from knowledge to ignorance ; from truth to falsehood ; from justice to injustice ; from kindness to cruelty ; from universal excellence to universal turpitude. Perfection can be changed into nothing but imperfection. The immutability of God is indispensable to the glory of his character, and is itself a part of his perfection ; for no mutable being can be perfect in the same sense with one who is immutable. Equally is it the corner-stone on which the universe rests. Were this support taken away, the immense fabric would tumble into ruin. To his creatures there would be neither safety nor hope ; but immensity and eternity would be filled with suspense, terror, and anguish.

Particularly, there would not in this case, be the least foundation for encouragement in prayer. If all the determinations of God were not settled in heaven, who could divine what new decisions would exist? what new laws? what new systems of administration? Prayer, commanded to-day, might be forbidden to-morrow. Prayer, acceptable to him to-day, might be hateful to him to-morrow. The things for which we now ask with certain assurance of being heard, might speedily be denied. He who at one season did his duty, might at another, by the very same conduct, be only exposed to punishment. Nothing in this case could be known by creatures to be permanently agreeable to his will, and finally secure of a reward. The government of the universe would be a government of fickleness and caprice, and consequently more or less, and no finite being can conjecture how far, a government of oppression and cruelty. Think what would be the exertions and effects of infinite knowledge and power, wielding the sceptre of the universe under the control of so dangerous a disposition. For aught that can be foreseen, the time might speedily, as well as easily arrive, when, under such a dominion, this vast empire might, in a moment of change, be reduced to a desert of ravage and ruin.

As things are actually ordered by God, every part of the system is established on immoveable foundations. Every intelligent creature knows therefore, or may know, on what he is absolutely to depend. If he is obedient, his obedience will always be acceptable to his Maker. The law, once established, will never be changed. 'Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it shall pass until all be fulfilled.' Every declaration of God is true; every promise will be exactly accomplished. Whatever sins or backslidings the children of God may have committed, his promise assures them of everlasting life. Whatever gross guilt, or impious rebellion, a Christian may have been the subject of, if they do not involve the sin against the Holy Ghost,

still, if he exercises repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, he will be received in the end.

Of this unchangeable system, one great and glorious part is, that every humble, faithful prayer shall be certainly heard, accepted, and answered. Not one ever was, or ever will be, offered up in vain. This scheme of things contains every possible encouragement to pray, and displays the absolute necessity, as well as the superior usefulness and efficacy of prayer. Any other scheme would exceedingly lessen, or entirely destroy, both the encouragement and the usefulness of prayer.

So far then are the predetermination and immutability of God from preventing and discouraging prayer, that they hold out infinitely more and greater inducements to this duty than can be furnished in any other manner.

I have dwelt the longer, and the more particularly, upon this objection, because I consider it as the fundamental one, and because I believe it to be in some minds regarded as possessing real weight, and attended by real difficulties.

2. *It is also objected, that it is useless and impertinent, to declare our wants to an omniscient Being, because he knows them already.*

That God knows all our wants, that he knows them more perfectly than ourselves, and that he thus knew them from eternity, will, it is presumed, be universally admitted here. This knowledge must be attributed to God by every man who believes the Scriptures, or considers him as the author of all things. To give him therefore any information concerning ourselves, with a supposition that he needs thus to be informed, can never be the intention of a Christian suppliant, nor any part of a Christian prayer.

The true end of reciting our wants before God is, doubtless, far distant from any thing that is even glanced at in the objection. Unquestionably, it is the same end with that which we propose in confess-

ing our sins; viz. the production of proper views in our own minds. It is to awaken in ourselves a strong sense of our feebleness, our guilt, our dependence on God for all good, and our indebtedness to him for every blessing which we receive. By such views deeply impressed, we are more happily prepared for the reception of blessings than we otherwise can be. We are rendered humble, submissive, affected with the greatness of our necessities, the importance of those supplies which we ask, and the glory of that goodness by which such wants of such beings are supplied. This state of mind is the happiest of all dispositions for the reception of mercies, and is inwrought effectually in us only by prayer. Unless man, therefore, has an interest in not acquiring this disposition, the objection is groundless.

3. *It is farther objected, that, as God is infinitely wise and good, whether we consider him as having predetermined all things, or not, his wisdom and goodness will prompt him to give us whatever is proper to be given, and to withhold whatever is not, equally with, and without, our prayers. Our prayers, therefore, must at the best be useless. 'We cannot,' says the objector, 'prevent, change, or influence the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness by our prayers. If we could, it would be wrong and undesirable, and ought plainly neither to be done, nor wished.'*

All this is readily admitted; and, were the design or the nature of prayer such as is here supposed, the impropriety of praying would, I presume, be also admitted. Certainly, it could never be a proper design in any creature, to attempt a change in the dictates of infinite wisdom and goodness.

But it may be very proper for infinite wisdom to bestow on a humble suppliant, that which it would very properly withhold from him who refuses to pray. The question is not here concerning what infinite wisdom will, or will not, give; but concerning the persons to whom it will give. Infinite wisdom may bestow all its favours on those who are willing to ask for them; and not on those who are

unwilling: on those who feel their dependance upon himself; not on those who say in their conduct,

What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him? on those who cheerfully and implicitly subject themselves to its dictates; not on those who speculate ingeniously concerning them.

Finally: Infinite wisdom may with propriety communicate its blessings to those who, by such means as are in their power, become prepared to receive them with a spirit of gratitude, reverence, and obedience; and may with equal propriety withhold them at the same time from such as are too proud, too indolent, too indifferent, or too worldly-minded to regard them with serious attention, or to receive them with a grateful or reverential spirit. Until all this can be disproved, the objection will stand for nothing. But this can never be disproved. Reason declares it all as her own decision; and revelation places it beyond a cavil or a doubt. In the Scriptures we are taught expressly, that such is the real system of infinite wisdom and goodness; and that blessings actually descend only as answers to prayer.

4. *It is further objected, that to suppose our prayers sufficiently efficacious to procure blessings for ourselves, and especially for others, indicates vanity and presumption.*

If we thought our prayers sufficiently meritorious in the sight of God, to deserve such blessings as are bestowed either on ourselves, or on others, there would be some ground for this objection. But when we pray, as an act of obedience to his will, it is obviously unfounded. There can be neither presumption nor vanity in believing that God is pleased with obedience, and that he will bless those who obey. God has commanded all men to pray to him. There is no presumption in believing this precept. He has declared, that faithful prayer is pleasing to him. There is no presumption in believing his declaration. He has promised to bless those who thus

pray. Without presumption we may rely on his promise.

He has commanded us to pray for all men ; and has promised to answer such prayers, when faithfully presented. In the Scriptures he has recorded numerous instances, in which he has actually answered such prayers, by giving blessings to those for whom they were asked. To obey this command, to confide in this promise, and to receive this testimony, is neither vain nor presumptuous. The contrary conduct is chargeable with this criminality ; for the objector supposes, that God will give him blessings in a way directly opposed to that in which alone he has encouraged men to expect them.

But farther: Does not God make one man the instrument of blessings to another—to many—to thousands—to millions ; and that in an immense variety of ways ? How does it appear that the heart, the desires, the supplications of a good man, may not be the means of such blessings, as truly, as properly, and as often as his voice, or his hands ? All these blessings come from God. Will not he, who ' seeth not as man seeth, but looketh on the heart,' as willingly regard the virtuous efforts of which he is there a witness, as those of the hands, or the tongue ? How few blessings do we enjoy, in which others have not been more or less instrumental ! For our daily food and raiment, nay, for our very being, we are indebted to those who have lived in every age of time. In the same manner we are now reaping the benefits flowing from the prayers of good men in all past ages. The salvation of every Christian, is a direct answer to the prayer of Christ ; John xvii. 21, 22.

These are all the material objections usually made against prayer, as a duty of man ; I mean, all which are customarily exhibited as material by the objectors themselves. If the observations which have here been made in answer to them, have the same weight in the minds of others, as in my own, it will be seen that they have no solid basis. Notwithstanding the

speciousness which, in the eyes of some individuals, they have seemed to wear, the encouragements to this duty mentioned in these Discourses stand altogether unassailed, and possessed of their whole strength. The objectors have conceived erroneously both of the nature and design of prayer, and misapprehended the proper influence of the several things from which they derive their supposed difficulties.

Let every one of my audience then go fearlessly and constantly to the duty of prayer; and be perfectly assured that, if he prays faithfully, he will not pray in vain. Let him remember, that prayer is a duty instituted by God; that he cannot but honour his own institution; and that he cannot but be pleased with those by whom it is obeyed. To pray is to obey God, to please him, to honour him. Those, 'who honour him, he will honour; while those, who despise him, shall be lightly esteemed.' He has set before you every motive to induce you to perform this duty; commands, examples, particularly that of Christ, promises, instances of the actual and wonderful efficacy of prayer, and the clearest testimonies of his own approbation. At the same time, while he has taught you that no blessing is given but in answer to prayer he has assured you also that all good, temporal and eternal, descends as its proper answer from heaven. Nothing has he left untried to persuade you to this duty.

With his good pleasure all your own interests conspire in urging you to pray. Prayer will make you daily better, wiser, and lovelier in his sight, by cherishing in you those views and emotions which constitute the character of a good man. It will soothe every tumult of your bosoms, allay your fears, comfort your sorrows, invigorate your hopes, give you peace in hand, and anticipate glory to come. It will restrain you from sin, strengthen you against temptation, recall you from wandering, give life and serenity to your consciences, furnish you with clearer views concerning your duty, alarm you concerning your danger, and inspire you with ardour, confidence,

and delight in the Christian course.

In prayer God will meet you, and commune with you face to face, as a man with his friend. He will 'lift upon you the light of his reconciled countenance;' will 'put joy and gladness in your hearts;' and will awaken in you the spirit of 'thanksgiving and the voice of melody!' 'When you pass through the waters he will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle on you: for he is the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.'—'In an acceptable time he will hear you, and in a day of salvation will he help you.'—'The mountains will indeed depart, and the hills be removed; but' (if you seek him faithfully) 'his kindness shall not depart from you, nor his covenant of peace be removed.'—'Seek, then, the Lord, while he may be found: call ye upon him, while he is near.'—'When you call, he will answer; and when you cry unto him, he will say, Here I am.'

SERMON CXLIV.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

FORMS OF PRAYER.

After this manner, therefore, pray ye. Our Father, which art in heaven; hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.—MATT. vi. 9—13.

In the preceding Discourse I finished the observations which I thought it necessary to make concerning the nature and seasons of prayer; the obligations to pray;

the usefulness of prayer; the encouragements to it; and the objections against it.

The next subject, which claims our attention in a System of Theology, is *forms of prayer*.

In the first verse of the text, our Saviour directs us to pray 'after the manner' begun in that verse, and continued through those which follow. There are *two modes* in which this direction may be understood. The first is, that this is *a form of prayer prescribed to us*; a form which therefore we are required to use, when we approach to God in this solemn service. Hence it has been considered as a strong proof that we are required to use a form of prayer, at least in the public worship of God, if not in that which is private. Even the candid and enlightened Paley says, 'The Lord's prayer is a precedent, as well as a pattern, for forms of prayer. Our Lord appears, if not to have prescribed, at least to have authorized, the use of fixed forms, when he complied with the request of a disciple, who said unto him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.' Luke xi. 1.

The other mode of construing this direction is this: Christ is supposed to have taught here those *subjects of prayer* which on all occasions are its proper subjects; the *spirit with which we are to pray*, and the *simplicity of style and manner* with which our thoughts are to be clothed, when we are employed in this duty.

That our Saviour is not here to be considered as prescribing a form of prayer to his followers, seems not improbable from a comparison of the text with the context. In the context he directs us 'not to do our alms before men, but in secret; when we pray to enter into our closets; when we fast, not to be of a sad countenance, that we may not appear unto men to fast; and not to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth.' None of these passages is, I apprehend, to be understood in the absolute, or literal sense. We *may* give alms before others. It is our duty to give bread to a starving man in the sight of our families. Nay, it is often our duty to contribute publicly to

public charities. We are warranted and required to pray and to fast before others ; and commanded to 'provide for our own, especially for those of our own households.' As none of these assertions will be disputed, they demand no proof. I shall only observe therefore, that the object of our Saviour in these precepts was to forbid ostentation, and covetousness ; and to establish a sincere, humble, self-denying temper in our minds.

As these directions, which are unambiguously expressed, are evidently not to be construed in the literal sense ; there is no small reason from analogy to believe, that the direction in the text, which is plainly ambiguous and indefinite, ought also not to be construed in this manner. There is, to say the least, as little reason to suppose that our Saviour has here directed us to use this form of prayer, as that he has required us to do alms, pray, and fast, only in secret ; and not to lay up property for the exigences of a future day.

The presumption is, I think, changed into a certainty by the following arguments :—

1. *According to this scheme, we are required always to use this form, and no other.*

The words, 'After this manner pray ye,' if understood literally, plainly require, that we *always* pray in this manner ; and therefore in no other. If they require us to use this form, they require us always to use it. But this will not be admitted by those who hold the opinion against which I contend.

2. *When our Saviour gives directions to his disciples, at another time, to pray after this manner, he uses several variations from the form which is here given.*

In Luke xi. 2, &c., our Saviour recites, in substance, the form of prayer which is contained in the text, and adopts no less than *ten variations*. These he, who is 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' adopted unquestionably with design. Of this design it was not improbably a part to teach us, that mere words are matters of such indifference, as at any time to be altered, with propriety, in whatever

manner the occasion may require.

One of the variations used by our Saviour in this place is the omission of the doxology. I am aware, that this is also omitted by a considerable number of manuscripts in the text. But the authority for the admission of it is such, as to have determined in its favour almost all critics, and given it a place, so far as I know, in almost every Bible. It is therefore to be considered as a genuine part of this prayer of our Saviour. This shews that the *substance* even of this prayer may without impropriety be varied, in one part or another, as the particular occasion may demand, or allow.

3. *The petitions here recited are not presented in the name of Christ.*

But our Saviour says, John xvi. 23, 24. 26, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name. Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. At that day ye shall ask in my name.' St. Paul also, in Col. iii. 17, says, 'Whatsoever ye do in word, or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, by him.' This prayer therefore is defective in one particular, which Christ and St. Paul have in these passages made essential to the acceptableness of our prayers.

4. *Christ himself does not appear to have used this prayer.*

We have several prayers of Christ recorded. A of these are such as plainly arose out of the occasion on which they were offered up. They were, in the strictest sense, *extemporaneous*: the mere effusions of his heart concerning the subjects by which they were prompted. So far then as the example of Christ may be supposed to bear upon this question, it is unfavourable to the supposition, that we are obliged to use this form; and favourable to the use of extemporaneous prayer.

5. *The apostles do not appear ever to have used this prayer.*

There are many prayers of the apostles recorded. All these were extemporaneous, like those of Christ, and the prophets who went before him, and sprang out of the occasion. If it be admitted, that the apostles are here an example to us, it will follow, that our own prayers may, to say the least, be with the strictest propriety, extemporaneous, and grow out of that state of facts by which we have been induced to pray. A full proof is also furnished here, that the apostles did not consider this form as obligatory on themselves.

6. *This prayer contains no expressions of thanksgiving.*

St. Paul, in Phil. iv. 6, says, ‘Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.’ A similar injunction is recorded 1 Tim. ii. 1. From both these it is evident, that St. Paul considered thanksgiving as universally and essentially a part of prayer. Had he considered this form as obligatory on himself, or upon Christians in general, or had Christians in general so considered the subject at that time, he must I think have added a form of thanksgiving as a supplement to this prayer; and not left them to express their thanksgivings extemporaneously in their own words. There is no perceptible reason why Christians should utter thanksgivings extemporaneously, in words of their own, rather than adorations, petitions, or confessions for sin. If the Spirit of inspiration thought proper to prescribe a form to us, in which we were required to present our petitions, it is reasonably believed that he would also prescribe to us a form in which the other parts also of this devotion were to be uttered.

7. *St. Paul refutes this supposition, when he requires us to ‘pray always with all prayer,’ Eph. vi. 18.*

From the prayers recorded in the Scriptures, of the ancient saints, of Christ, and his apostles, we know that there is much prayer which, unless by very distant application, cannot be said to be contained in this form. In the sentence which contains

this precept of St. Paul, he directs the Ephesians to pray that 'utterance might be given unto him; and that 'he might open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel.' It will hardly be pretended, that this request is clearly contained in the Lord's prayer. The same thing is true of a vast multitude of other prayers found in the Scriptures. The truth plainly is, that the prayers contained in this sacred book almost universally sprang from particular occasions; are exactly such as suited those occasions, the natural effusions of the heart contemplating their nature, and feeling their importance. This fact effectually teaches us what it is to 'pray always with all prayer:' viz. what I formerly explained it to be: *to pray on every proper occasion with prayer suited to that occasion.* But this cannot be accomplished unless we pray often, at least, without a form, and in the extemporaneous manner.

These arguments, if I mistake not, prove that the Lord's prayer was not prescribed to Christians as a form which they were intended or required to adopt. That it may be used, both lawfully and profitably, at various times, both in public and private, and that it may be very often thus used, I entertain not a single doubt.

The question concerning forms of prayer is now become a question of mere expediency. If the Lord's prayer is not enjoined upon us; it is certain, that no other form of prayer can lay the least claim to such an injunction.

It is well known, that various sects of Christians are attached to forms of prayer in the public worship of God, and sometimes even in private worship. Such forms are prescribed by them as directories of public worship; and all those who belong to their communion are required to worship in this manner. Every objection to extemporaneous prayer is considered, and I think justly, by these Christians as evidence of the advantages of a liturgy; and may, without any inconvenience, and without any discrimina-

tion, be blended with the positive arguments in favour of worshipping by a form. I shall therefore blend them in the following examination. These arguments I consider as collected by Dr. Paley, so far as they have any force. I shall therefore follow this respectable writer in this discussion.

In behalf of forms of prayer, as directories of public worship, it is pleaded,

I. *That the use of them prevents the use of improper prayers ; such, particularly, as are absurd, extravagant, or impious.*

‘ These,’ says Dr. Paley, ‘ in an order of men so numerous as the sacerdotal, the folly and enthusiasm of many must always be in danger of producing, where the conduct of the public worship is intrusted, without restraint or assistance, to the discretion and abilities of the officiating minister.’

To the argument here alleged, I reply, That this complaint has been originated by those who have used liturgies, and not by those who have worshipped with extemporaneous prayer. Yet these persons are incomparably more interested to complain ; because, if the evil exists, they, and they only, suffer by it. At the same time, they are also the only proper judges, as being the only persons who have sufficient experience of this evil, or the want of a liturgy, to enable them to judge. The allegation was invented therefore to justify the use of a liturgy already adopted ; and not admitted as a proof of the necessity of worshipping by a liturgy ; and as a truth forced upon the conviction of men by the existence of the evil, which in this case it would be intended to remedy.

Facts are often discordant with theories, and often refute them. Such, I apprehend, is the truth in the present case. In the vast multitude of Christian congregations who in Switzerland, Protestant France, Germany, Ireland, and America, in Holland, England, and Scotland, worship without a form, no material difficulty of this nature has ever been perceived. Within the many millions of man-

kind who for centuries have worshipped in this manner, there has certainly been a sufficient number of enlightened men, a sufficient length of time, and a sufficient variety of character and circumstances, to have presented, and to have felt, this evil, if it has actually existed, in every manner and degree in which it is capable of existing. Yet no complaint has ever prevailed to any extent, in any Protestant age or country, among those who have worshipped without forms of prayer. It will not be pretended that among these persons, religion, in the proper sense, has not had as extensive and happy influence as it has had during the same period among any of the human race.

That there have been solitary instances of this nature I readily admit. But that they have been sufficiently numerous to furnish ground for this allegation cannot be seriously maintained for a moment by any man who considers this fact with candour, or even with sober attention.

I speak not here of the performances of ignorant men, who thrust themselves into the desk, without right, propriety, or even decency; nor of those who, without any appearance of piety, are admitted into the church, merely because they are (in the language of Dr. Paley) 'descendants of large families,' and for the purpose of furnishing them with easy means of subsistence: men who, as this writer says, are 'no farther ministers of religion, than as a cockade makes a soldier.' From the former of these classes extravagant addresses to God, from the latter, such as are impious, and from both such as are absurd, may indeed be expected. But the existence of such persons in the desk, although an indelible reproach to those who are bound to 'lay hands suddenly on no man,' and to all who voluntarily attend the ministry of these persons, infers no objection against extemporaneous prayer. Among the men who are educated and morally qualified for the ministry, too few will always be found guilty of this conduct to furnish any serious argument in favour of a liturgy

While among so many and so discreet Christians, who through many ages, and in many countries have worshipped in this manner, no difficulty of this kind has ever been seriously felt, the objection is plainly imaginary.

Prayer is, of all kinds of discourse, that which least demands elegance of style. Every professed ornament it rejects with disdain. The simplest, plainest, and least artificial manner of uttering his thoughts alone becomes the character of a suppliant, or the occasion and design of his supplication. He who feels inclined to pray will loathe all critical phraseology in his prayers. Decency, every where demanded, is indispensable in the worship of God; but beyond this nothing is necessary in our prayers, beside humility, faithfulness, and fervour. But decency is easily attainable by men of moderate talents, without the aid of a superior education. Plain men, as is not unfrequently seen both in private and public religious assemblies, pray with much propriety, and with no small edification to their fellow-Christians. He who has universally made prayer a prime duty of man, has qualified man for the performance of this duty; and, as I apprehend, much more happily than this objection supposes.

2. *It is objected also, that extemporaneous prayer must be attended with confusion in the mind of the hearer.*

The ignorance of each petition before it is heard, the want of time to join in it after it is heard, the necessary suspension of devotion until it is concluded, the necessity of attending to what succeeds, the detraction of the mind from its proper business by the very novelty with which it is gratified, form together the sources of this confusion, and furnish, in the view of Dr. Paley, a fundamental objection against extemporary prayer, even where the minister's office is discharged with every possible advantage and accomplishment. Concerning this objection I observe,

(1.) *That it attaches a gross and fundamental impropriety to the prayers of inspired men, mentioned in the Scriptures.*

The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple was, I think, unquestionably intended to awaken the spirit of devotion in the great assembly before which it was uttered, and to become the vehicle of their own supplications. But this design was impracticable on that occasion, and with respect to that assembly, as truly and as extensively as with respect to any *modern* congregation of Christians. There are many instances also in which the apostles and their fellow-Christians assembled for prayer. The prayers actually uttered on these occasions were, I think, with a degree of probability next to certainty, extemporary. The persons who heard them could no better tell the import of each petition before they heard it, than modern Christian assemblies. Their devotion was as much suspended, until a petition was concluded. They were as much held in continual expectation; were detained as much from their proper business of joining in prayer; and were in *all other* respects subjected to as many disadvantages. The unavoidable conclusion from these premises is, that the apostles prayed in a manner unfitted for the purposes of devotion, unedifying to those with whom they prayed, and of course unapproved by the Spirit of God.

This conclusion no objector will admit. But if an objector refuse to admit the conclusion, he must, I think, give up the premises. If men could profitably unite in extemporary prayer in the days of Solomon, or in the days of the apostles, they can do it now.

(2.) *The same objection lies with equal force, to a great extent, against the union, which the objectors themselves suppose to exist, and will acknowledge to be absolutely necessary, in other parts of religious worship.*

A considerable number of persons, from perhaps one half to seven-eighths of the whole number, usually gathered in religious assemblies, are, throughout almost all Christian countries, *unable to read*. Of these it may be properly observed here, that from the confused manner in which the responses in a liturgy will ever be read by a numerous and mixed assembly,

they must very imperfectly hear and understand this part of the prayers. That which they gain by hearing, however, is all which they gain. All these, unless they learn the prayers by heart, a fact which, it is presumed, rarely happens, must be in a much less favourable situation in some respects, and better situated in none, than when they are present at extemporary prayers.

Equally unable are these persons to *read psalms*. If men cannot join in the prayers uttered by a minister, it will be difficult to shew how they can unite in the praises sung by a choir.

My audience well know, that *hearing the word of God* is in my own view, a part, and a very solemn and important part, of *public worship*. To receive divine truth and divine precepts, as being really divine, with reverence, faith, and love, is an ordinance as truly appointed by God, and as acceptable means of honouring him, as prayer or praise. To hear with any advantage, it is necessary, that we should both *understand* and *feel* what we hear. In order to *understand*, it is indispensable that we *examine* every thing uttered by the preacher, which is not absolutely obvious, with a *momentary investigation* employed upon each of his assertions. In order to *feel*, it is equally necessary that a little longer time should be spent upon every part of a discourse, which is fitted to awaken feeling. The time necessary for both these acts of the mind must, at least, be equal to that which is demanded for such union in prayer, as will make the several petitions our own. But all the confusion, suspense, detention, and embarrassment from novelty, will here have as much influence to prevent us from hearing a sermon in a proper manner, as from joining in extemporary prayer. Here also the labouring recollection, and embarrassed or tumultuous delivery, of which Dr. Paley complains, will have their full effect. Most men, unless when destitute of self-possession, speak extemporaneously with more distinctness and propriety than they read; and are therefore more readily and perfectly understood. But if

an audience do not understand and feel a sermon, they fail as effectually of performing this part of religious worship, as of performing the duty of prayer, when they do not join in the petitions. The same difficulties therefore attend, thus far, the performance of both these religious services, which are here supposed to attend extemporary prayer. It is presumed, however, that they are imaginary in both cases: for,

(3.) *The answer to the former objection is applicable, with the same force, to this: viz. That the difficulties complained of have never existed in such a manner as to be of serious importance, in the view of those who have worshipped publicly with extemporary prayer.*

In the long periods throughout which, and among the numerous millions by whom, this mode of worship has been adopted, no complaint of any magnitude has ever arisen concerning this subject. It will not be asserted, and with decency cannot, that these persons have been less serious, less scrupulous about their worship, or less anxious to perform the duties of religion aright, than an equal number of their fellow-Christians. Experience therefore is wholly against both these objections; and experience is the only evidence, or umpire, in the case.

The advocates for forms of prayer admit that they are attended by some disadvantages. Among these, Dr. Paley considers the two following as the principal.

1. *That forms of prayer composed in one age become unfit for another, by the unavoidable change of language, circumstances, and opinions.*

This objection must, doubtless, be allowed to have some degree of force. I do not however, think it necessarily of very serious importance. To make frequent alterations in so solemn a service, would certainly be dangerous. Nor ought they ever to be made without extreme caution. Yet when they are plainly demanded by existing circumstances, it can hardly be supposed, that a collection of Christians would refuse their consent to safe and reasonable changes: especially after the evil had become considerable.

2. *That the perpetual repetition of the same form of words, produces weariness and inattentiveness in the congregation.*

This I esteem a more serious difficulty than the former, so far as such a repetition exists; while I readily acknowledge, that its existence appears to me unnecessary. For this evil Dr. Paley observes, 'Devotion may supply a remedy.' I admit that it may, and doubt not that in individual minds it does, at least in a considerable measure. Still the objection is far from being removed. Every mode of worship ought to be so formed, as to *awaken* devotion, always too languid, and not so as to *diminish* a flame which is scarcely perceptible. It is the nature of all repetition, as well as of continual sameness, soon to weary minds, formed like ours with an inherent love of change and novelty. This, in every other case, is perceived and acknowledged. No reason appears why it should not be acknowledged in this. Devotion easily languishes in the most pious minds, and ought therefore to be assisted, not repressed. The best men complain often and justly of lukewarm affections, and wandering thoughts. What then shall be said of others? Certainly the fervour of devotion referred to, must be unsafely relied on, to remedy the evils of a wearisome service in the minds of a congregation at large.

To obviate the force of these remarks, it may be said that psalms and hymns are sung in frequent repetition. I reply, that these are rarely repeated, when compared with repetitions in forms of prayer. Yet even these, when sung several times within a short period, become obviously tiresome.

But besides that the psalms are given us in the Scripture, and are therefore regarded with a reverence which can be claimed by no human composition, both psalms and hymns are always sung; and are therefore recommended to the hearer by the powerful aid of music. This is an advantage which nothing else can boast, and counterbalances whatever tediousness would otherwise be found in any

necessary or proper repetition. These therefore may be fairly laid aside, as being without the debate.

3. *To these objections ought to be added another; That the mode of uttering the forms of prayer in actual use is unhappy.*

This mode, as is well known, is the audible union of a whole congregation in reading each prayer, throughout a considerable part of the service. The effect of this practice, so far as I can judge from my own experience, is, in a greater or less degree, to disturb the attention, and confound the thoughts, of the several suppliants. How far the power of habit may go towards lessening or removing these evils, it is impossible for me, without more experience of the effects of this mode of worship, to judge. But, independently of this consideration, so many voices set by nature to so many different keys, and directed in so many different methods of modulation, are certainly an embarrassment of that quietness and steadiness of thought, that entire self-possession, so desirable during the time of religious worship. Sounds which are very numerous are, when uttered at the same moment, almost of course perplexing. Discordant sounds are necessarily unpleasant; and no circumstances can prevent this effect on the mind.

4. *Forms of prayer must necessarily be general whereas, the nature of prayer demands that our petitions should in a great measure be particular.*

It is no part of the design of prayer to change the purposes or conduct of the Creator. Its whole import consists in exciting our obedience to him, and the amendment of ourselves. By awakening in our minds a sense of our guilt, dangers, necessities, helplessness, dependance, and indebtedness; of our own littleness, and the greatness, wisdom, and goodness of our Maker, we are improved in our moral character, and fitted to receive the blessings which we need. The more these emotions are excited, the more effectually are these ends accomplished. Of course, the most advantageous means

Hence, it will be easily seen, that prayer ought as far as may be, to consist of petitions, confessions, thanksgiving, and adoration, formed in particular (not in general) thoughts and expressions. General declarations and images of all kinds, except when eminently important, are feeble and unimpressive. Particular ones, on the contrary, are deeply and alone impressive.

Whenever the end of what we speak or write, is to interest either the imagination, or the heart, it is a rule of every rhetorical writer, and ordinarily the practice of every man who follows nature, to use particular images and expressions. No reason appears why this rule, founded in the native character of man, may not be applied to the present case with the same propriety as to any other.

The principal end of prayer is, not to *teach*, but to *move the heart*. The more this rule is followed, the more will the end be attained. In all the warrantable means of quickening the affections, prayer ought plainly to abound. Both the sentiments and language ought to be simple, artless, apparently the result of no labour, derived from the occasion, and springing directly from the heart. To this scheme, the confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings should, I think, be generally conformed, wherever it is intended to be made deeply impressive.

This is a purpose which no form of prayer, however admirably composed, can successfully accomplish. Designed for so many persons, occasions, and ages, it must of necessity be to a great extent general; and so far defective. The mind, deeply interested by the occasion, must be disappointed of what it naturally expects, and displeased when it finds the strain of sentiment falling short of its own feelings. In this degree therefore, it will fail of being edified. The emotions which it wishes to have excited, and which the occasion demands and awakens, are either faintly excited, or suffered to sleep. If persons accustomed to the use of a liturgy find, as they think,

those difficulties in extemporary prayer which are alleged by Dr. Paley, such as are accustomed to prayer of this nature complain, with not less feeling, and as they apprehend with not less reason, of the general, unimpressive character of forms, and their want of perceptible adaptation to the particular circumstances of the suppliants.

Almost every prayer recorded in the Scriptures sprang out of the case which prompted it, and expresses its particular, important, and most affecting circumstances. Such are Abraham's for Ishmael, Gen. xvii.; Abraham's for Sodom, Gen. xviii.; Lot's for himself, Gen. xix.; Isaac's for Jacob and Esau, Gen. xxvii.; Jacob's for himself, Gen. xxviii.; those of Moses for Israel, Exod. xxxii. and xxxiii.; Gideon's, Judges vi.; Sampson's, Judges xvi.; Hannah's, 1 Sam. ii.; David's, 2 Sam. vii.; Solomon's, 1 Kings viii.; Jehoshaphat's for Judah, 2 Chron. xx.; Hezekiah's for Israel, 2 Kings xix.; Hezekiah's for himself, 2 Kings xx.; Ezra's for Judah, Ezra ix.; the prayer of the Levites for Judah, Neh. ix.; those of Jeremiah and Daniel, that of Josiah, those recorded of Christ, and those recorded of the apostles.

In all these and several other instances, particularly many contained in the Psalms, the prayer is chiefly directed to the occasion in hand, whether a public or private one; for it is to be remembered, that several of them were prayers of the most public nature; and, although uttered chiefly by individuals, were uttered in the midst of great assemblies, and offered up in their name. Nor is there, so far as remember, a single prayer recorded in the Scriptures (the text being here laid out of the question), which has at all the aspect of having been a form, or a part of a standing liturgy.

From these observations it will be seen, that prayer is no other than the thoughts of a devotional mind ascending silently to God, or audibly expressed. What these thoughts are in the *mind*, the prayer & the voice ought ever to be. Hence, as the thoughts

will vary, so the prayer will also vary, according to the numberless cases of suppliants; the cares, wants, fears, distresses, supplies, hopes, and joys. In this manner, the prophets, apostles, and our Saviour himself, prayed. Thus the Spirit of God directed those who alone were under his express direction. Whatever 'infirmities' we, who are uninspired, may labour under, the same 'Spirit' may with humble confidence be expected to 'help,' so far as it shall be necessary for us, as he helped theirs. Their example he has recorded both for our instruction and encouragement. As their circumstances gave birth both to their thoughts and expressions, no reason appears why our prayers should not arise also out of our circumstances. The difficulties supposed to attend this manner of worshipping God, will it is believed vanish, if our hearts are engaged in our services.

Such are the views which have occurred to me concerning this subject. Still, I have no controversy with those who think forms of prayer most edifying to themselves. They undoubtedly must be their own judges. Particularly, as their experience concerning this side of the question has been far greater than mine, I cannot controvert the decisions of this experience, so far as they are to respect themselves only. Very many unquestionable and excellent Christians have worshipped in both these methods. In both these methods therefore men may be excellent Christians, and worship God in an acceptable manner. On this subject, whether considered as a subject of speculation or of practice, no debate ought ever to arise, except that which is entirely catholic and friendly; and no feelings, besides those which are of the most charitable nature. Zeal, however commendable it may be in some cases, seems here out of place.

I have now finished the observations which I have thought proper to make concerning forms of prayer, and concerning the Lord's prayer, considered as either requiring or warranting us to pray by a form. It may, however, be proper to add, as a

mere opinion of my own, that it is perfectly proper, and will be wise for all such persons as are in danger of losing their self-possession, or of being otherwise embarrassed when they are to perform this duty, whether in public or in private, to obtain well-written forms of prayer, and make them their directories in the performance of this duty. This practice I should recommend also so long as the danger of embarrassment should continue, even if it should continue through life. To pray by a form may not be the best method of directing this duty at large, and may yet be the best method which, in given circumstances, will be in our power. It certainly will be far more desirable to use a form of prayer, than to pray in an embarrassed and interrupted manner.

In the beginning of this Discourse, I have suggested that the Lord's prayer was intended to teach us the subjects, the spirit, and the manner of our prayers. Concerning the subjects we are taught particularly, that we ought to pray continually and extensively for the prosperity of the kingdom and worship of God, and the conversion and obedience of mankind; to ask daily for our daily bread; for the forgiveness of our sins; for a spirit of forgiveness towards others; for security against temptations; and for protection and deliverance from evil, both natural and moral. We are also here directed to look to God, as our Father and Friend, for parental love, tenderness, and blessings; and to rejoice that 'the kingdom, the power, and the glory' are his, and will be his only, and for ever.

These things are all plainly taught in this very remarkable form of prayer. They are, however, far from being all that are taught. No composition, it is presumed, ever contained more, or more valuable instruction. Among the truths which are obviously involved in it, are the following:—

1. That we are not to expect a gracious audience of God, 'for our much speaking,' but for the *sincerity, humility, and piety*, with which we pray.

2. That *all places*, where we can pray with de-

cency, and without ostentation and interruption, are proper places for the performance of this duty.

All men are to use this prayer, at least in substance ; but all men cannot resort for this purpose to the temple of Jerusalem, to a church, nor to any other places supposed to be consecrated.

3. That prayer is a *social employment*.

'Our Father' is the language of numbers ; of a family, or of a congregation : not of an individual. Similar phraseology runs also through the whole form.

4. That we are to pray for *others*.

Three of these petitions are employed as prayer for others ; viz. the three first.

5. That we are equally dependant on God for *spiritual* good, as for *temporal* ; and for safety from moral, as well as from natural, evil.

6. That *our desires* for natural good must always be *moderate* and *humble*.

We are here taught to pray daily, not for *wealth*, but for 'daily bread'

7. That we cannot pray acceptably, unless we exercise a *spirit of forgiveness* towards our enemies.

8. That we are to pray equally for those things which God has *foretold*, as for those which to us are unknown and uncertain.

God has foretold, that 'his name shall be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will be done,' in the manner here specified : yet for these things we are directed to pray.

9. That the *predetermination* of God, therefore, ought never to be a *hindrance*, nor *discouragement* to prayer.

That God has predetermined, that his kingdom shall be built up, his name hallowed, and his will done, throughout the earth, will not be questioned by any man, who reads and believes the Bible. Yet for these things we are here required to pray.

Finally : We are taught by this prayer, that he who does not sincerely desire that 'the name of God may be hallowed,' that 'his kingdom may come, and his will be done ;' who cannot heartily rejoice, that 'the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are

his,' and will be his throughout eternity; and who cannot subjoin to all these things his own solemn 'Amen;' does not and cannot pray in the manner required by the Redeemer of mankind.

SERMON CXLV.

THE MEANS OF GRACE.

ORDINARY MEANS OF GRACE.

INTERCOURSE WITH RELIGIOUS MEN.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.

PROV. xiii. 20.

HAVING finished the proposed examination of the great Christian duty of prayer, I shall now proceed to the next subject in the order formerly mentioned: viz.

Intercourse with religious men.

The text informs us, that 'he who walketh with wise men shall be wise.' Wisdom, it is well known, is extensively employed by the divine writers, particularly by Solomon, to denote religion. 'Wise men' therefore are, in the language of the Scriptures, religious men.

To 'walk,' denotes, in the same language, to converse familiarly and frequently, or to have our whole course of life intimately and familiarly connected with the persons or objects with whom, or amid which, we are supposed to walk.

The following doctrine is therefore obviously contained in the text: *That he who lives and converses frequently and intimately with religious men, may ordinarily be expected to become religious.* The declaration in the text is absolute; but I understand such declarations as usually meaning no more than I have here expressed. Thus, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,' another expression of the same nature, intends not, that every child thus educated will certainly become religious, but that this will ordinarily

be the fact, and may therefore always be fairly expected.

There are two senses in which the text, without any violence, may be understood: the obvious one,

That persons hitherto destitute of religion will assume this character; and the more remote one,

That persons already religious will by this intercourse become more so. 'He that walketh with wise men shall be wise:' that is, *emphatically, or eminently.*

I shall take the liberty to consider the subject with respect to both these senses.

I. *Those who are destitute of religion, and converse frequently and religiously with religious men, may ordinarily be expected to become religious.*

In proof of this position, I observe,

1. *Religion, in the conduct of a man really and eminently possessed of this character, appears to others to be real.*

The Bible exhibits religion with abundant proof, and with supreme force and beauty. It presents this great subject to us in the form of doctrines, precepts, and, so far as history can furnish them, of examples also. It presents us at the same time with the most satisfactory arguments, to prove that these exhibitions are made by the hand of God himself. Still, although the mind is unable to deny the sufficiency, force, and beauty of the representation, or to refute the arguments by which it is supported, it can withdraw itself from both; and in this manner can avoid the conviction which it is intended to produce, and the emotions which it is fitted to inspire. The subject is naturally uncongenial to the taste of man; and from every such subject man almost instinctively wishes to withdraw his attention, and turn his eye away. To do this is almost always in his power; and however dangerous may be the conduct, and however desirable the contrary conduct, will almost of course be the dictate of inclination. The subject which he disrelishes he can shun. To the arguments which sustain it he can refuse to listen. Against the evidence which they convey he can close his eyes.

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In this manner it will be easy for him to say, in the case under consideration, 'The religion, presented to us in the gospel forms indeed an excellent character, and would be not a little desirable, were it real and attainable by such a being as man. But, out of the Scriptures, where shall it be found? There are, it is true, those who profess to be religious; and who, it must be acknowledged, are somewhat more grave, specious, and imposing in their deportment than most other men. But I see nothing in their character which may not be rivalled by other men; nothing which may not be explained by the common principles of our nature; nothing which proves them to possess the extraordinary spirit exhibited in the gospel. I think therefore it may be reasonably concluded that the religion taught in the Scriptures, although beautiful and desirable to the eye of the mind, exists in the Scriptures only, and has no real or practical being in the hearts of men. As a speculative object it is commendable, as a practical one, it is I think chiefly imaginary.' Such may be, such I doubt not often have been, the sentiments of persons living under the gospel concerning religion; persons who have read the accounts concerning it given in the Scriptures, and at the same time have surveyed the conduct of its professors only at a distance, and seen it only in the gross. Nor can it be denied, that these sentiments, although false and groundless, are yet natural, frequent, and in a sense common.

But in real life the subject plainly wears a different aspect. There are many persons and many cases, by whom and in which the spirit of the gospel is manifested so unambiguously, as to allow of no doubt concerning its reality, nature, and efficacy in the mind of an honest beholder. The evidence is of such a nature that it cannot be evaded, unless by a prejudice too gross, a violation of conscience too palpable, to be admitted by a man, who can lay any claim to fairness of character. It would be oftener seen, and oftener acknowledged, were the person on whom the sight and acknowledgment might have the

nappy influence under consideration, to converse more frequently and more intimately with men of piety. If we were really to walk with wise men, if we were to live by their side, mark their conduct, compare it with that of others, and inquire concerning the principles from which it was derived, it would be difficult for us to mistake the nature of this subject. We should see the conduct itself to be exceedingly different, nay, in many respects directly opposite, in the two cases. Effects of this diverse and opposite nature we should be compelled to attribute to diverse and opposite causes. One class of them we should, in a word, be obliged to ascribe to religion, and the other to the native character of man. Even in our secret thoughts we should be forced to make this acknowledgment. The understanding could not withdraw itself from conviction, and conscience would not fail to hold up the subject in full view.

2. *In the conduct of such men religion also appears solemn, dignified, and superior.*

All wicked men, unless when under the influence of violent passion, necessarily feel the superiority of those who are truly and unaffectedly virtuous. A sense of this superiority, and of their own comparative depression, is the source, in an extensive degree, of that hostility which they so often manifest towards persons of this character. From these emotions no such man can escape. In the neighbourhood of virtue they are always in the shade, and are not unfrequently shrunk and withered. Milton, after having recited the rebuke of Zephon to Satan, says very justly, as well as very beautifully,

‘ Abash’d the Devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Virtue in her shape how lovely.’

Such, in multiplied instances, has been the effect of rebukes administered by virtuous men to those who were wicked.

The awe, the reverence, the consciousness of

periority, inspired in the minds of sinners by virtue, appearing with its own solemn and venerable dignity, are not always accompanied nor followed by hatred. If I mistake not, they in many instances terminate in a settled respect and admiration for the virtuous persons by whose conduct they were excited; emotions, not unfrequently productive of the happiest effects on the hearts and lives of those by whom they are entertained. It is unnecessary to prove, that men naturally seek the company of those whom they respect and admire. As little is it necessary to shew, that the sentiments and opinions of such persons have, of course, no small influence over the minds of such as thus seek their company. Between reverencing and embracing the sentiments of persons thus situated, the steps are few, and the transition is easy. There is the utmost reason to believe that this happy progress has often taken place.

3. *In the conduct of such men also religion appears lovely.*

The consciences of sinful men, perhaps of all such men, when their consciences are permitted to testify at all, testify to the loveliness of evangelical virtue. In their language, I confess, it is often denied; and still more frequently, perhaps, is given in a grudging, niggardly manner. By their consciences it is acknowledged of course.

Wherever the judgment of the mind is allowed to decide without a bias, it of course pronounces the law of God to require nothing but what is reasonable, excellent, and useful. Of this nature, beyond a question, is piety to its Author, and benevolence to his creatures. In no form can these exercises of mind be manifested, without being seen to be amiable by every unprejudiced eye. Justice, kindness, truth, disinterestedness, forgiveness to enemies, and mercy to the suffering, are always desirable, always lovely. With the same amiableness is the government of our passions and appetites regularly adorned. Meekness, gentleness, sobriety, and temperance, are indispensable to an amiable character;

and all persons who wish to be loved by others, are forced invariably either to assume, or at least to exhibit, these characteristics to their fellow-men.

The *union* of these attributes is the consummation of moral excellence to man, and involves whatever is really and eminently lovely. Wherever they are thus united, and are at the same time exhibited in their native light, without the obscuring influence of characteristical passions, prejudices, uncouthness, or vulgarity, the understanding is compelled to acknowledge their excellence, and, secretly at least, to pronounce them lovely. Even gross and hard-hearted men, much more persons possessing dispositions naturally sweet and susceptible, are often greatly affected by the sincere and artless display of these attributes. In many instances, there is good reason to believe, they produce in the minds of unrenewed men a conviction of the reality of religion, which argument has never been able to produce; and a sense of its worth, followed by the happiest consequences.

A man of my acquaintance, who was of a vehement and rigid temper, had many years since a dispute with a friend of his, a professor of religion, and had been injured by him. With strong feelings of resentment he made him a visit, for the avowed purpose of quarrelling with him. He accordingly stated to him the nature and extent of the injury, and was preparing, as he afterward confessed, to load him with a train of severe reproaches; when his friend cut him short by acknowledging with the utmost readiness and frankness the injustice of which he had been guilty, expressing his own regret for the wrong which he had done, requesting his forgiveness, and proffering him ample compensation. He was compelled to say, that he was satisfied; and withdrew full of mortification, that he had been precluded from venting his indignation, and wounding his friend with keen and violent reproaches for his conduct. As he was walking homeward, he said to himself to this effect: 'There must be something more in religion than I have hitherto suspected. Were any

man to address me in the tone of haughtiness and provocation with which I accosted my friend this evening, it would be impossible for me to preserve the equanimity of which I have been a witness; and especially with so much frankness, humility, and meekness to acknowledge the wrong which I have done, so readily ask forgiveness of the man whom I had injured, and so cheerfully promise a satisfactory recompense. I should have met his anger with at least equal resentment, paid him reproach for reproach, and inflicted wound for wound. There is something in *this man's* disposition, which is not in *mine*. There is something in the religion which he professes, and which I am forced to believe he feels; something which makes him so superior, so much better, so much more amiable, than I can pretend to be. The subject strikes me in a manner to which I have hitherto been a stranger. It is high time to examine it more thoroughly, with more candour, and with greater solicitude also, than I have done hitherto.'

From this incident a train of thoughts and emotions commenced in the mind of this man, which terminated in his profession of the Christian religion, his relinquishment of the business in which he was engaged, and his consecration of himself to the ministry of the gospel.

4. *The conversation of religious persons has often great power upon the consciences of sinners.*

None can set the truths of the gospel in so strong or solemn a point of view as those who feel them. None can speak of sin so justly, so clearly, or so pungently, as those who under alarming convictions have realized their guilt and their danger, and been roused by a strong sense of their ruin to the most anxious and laborious efforts for their recovery; and who, with an ingenuous contrition of heart, have learned to realize its hateful nature, as well as its dreadful consequences. None can speak of holiness like those who understand its nature, the delightful tenor of its affection, the peace which accompanies

it, and the joy which it inspires, by their own undeceiving, impressive, and happy experience.

Who can present in such strong, affecting, awful colours the world of perdition, as will naturally be employed by those who have beheld its transcendent evils with realized conviction, and deep amazement, who have seen it naked before them, felt their own near approach to its sufferings, and still tremble under a sense of their marvellous escape?

Who can bring heaven before the eyes, and delineate with a glowing pencil, in living colours, its immortal glory, like those who have thought long and often of that happy world, with the 'faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,' and 'the hope,' which 'entereth into that within the veil?' Who can discourse concerning the celestial paradise like those who, with a divine relish already formed in their minds, are prepared to enjoy the blessings of eternal life; who, conscious that they 'are pilgrims and strangers here,' regard themselves as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and look forward with delightful anticipation to that period, when they shall there be united to all who love them, and to all whom they love?

Who can reprove with such pungency, with such efficacy, with such success, as those who are believed to be in earnest, to loathe and shun the sin which they reprove, and to delight in the holiness which they inculcate? Who can reprove in so acceptable or so persuasive a manner, as those who perform this delicate and difficult duty with the meekness and gentleness, the humility and forbearance of the gospel, and whose lives, 'adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour,' add to every remonstrance the peculiar weight of an unblemished example?

What is true of these subjects, is equally applicable to all others which are made the themes of religious conversation. 'The words of the wise,' that is, of religious men, says Solomon, 'are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.' 'The words of the wise,' says Peter, in his translation

of this passage, 'are as goads, or as if planted with briars.'

When the disciples went to Emmaus, they expressed the influence of Christ's conversation in these remarkable terms: 'Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?' The conversation of pious men is not, indeed, that of Christ; but it possesses in some degree the same influence; and wherever it is conformed to the gospel, and conducted with the prudence which the gospel requires, cannot fail to leave behind it desirable effects.

In the revivals of religion, when conversation concerning this subject prevails, and the tidings of conversion are multiplied, when the power of sympathy is awake, and the soul is prepared readily to interest itself in the spiritual affairs of its fellow-men, every thing pertaining to their religious circumstances appears to have a peculiar influence upon the minds of others. Their views and affections, their conversation and their conduct, nay, the bare narratives of whatever pertains to their religious interests, appear through the power of sympathy, to produce great, extensive, and happy effects on those, to whom they are made known. It is a remark of President Edwards, derived from his own observation during an extraordinary revival of religion, that 'nothing seemed to produce greater effects on the minds of his own congregation, than recitals of the prevalence of religion in other places.'

The more frequent and the more intimate our intercourse with such persons is, the greater and the happier is its efficacy. The same thing is true, when the persons with whom we converse and live are possessed of characters peculiarly venerable, or of manners and dispositions peculiarly lovely. Amiable companions, near and affectionate relatives, parents, ministers, and rulers, when persons of unaffected piety, contribute more by their conversation and example than can be easily imagined to spread religion among mankind, and to preserve the world from pro-

fligacy and ruin. The 'light' of these persons 'so shines before others, that they, beholding their good works,' actually 'glorify their Father, who is in heaven.'*

II. *Persons already religious will by this intercourse become more so.*

All the observations made under the preceding head are applicable to this also, and with additional force. But there are other considerations peculiar to this, and those of distinguished importance.

1. *Persons already religious are prepared to realize whatever is communicated to them by others of the same character.*

'As face answereth to face in the water, so doth the heart of man to man.' This observation may be emphatically applied to the hearts of Christians. Their views are substantially the same, their taste is the same, their character is the same. They have all a common interest, are engaged in common pursuits, and are bound towards a common home. They are all of one family; are children of one Parent, and followers of one Redeemer. All of them discern 'spiritual things in a spiritual manner,' and relish them with a spiritual taste. To the interests of the divine kingdom, and to the concerns of the least individual who belongs to it, not one of them is indifferent. All are prepared to feel the concerns of all; and by every one, so far as they are communicated, they are actually felt. Every thing therefore in the life and conversation of one Christian, will easily be transferred to his own circumstances by every other.

It is easy to perceive, that mutual communications among persons of such a character, and in such circumstances, will of course be regarded as the communications of friends and brethren. Every man knows with what a welcome he hears, how readily he believes, how deeply he feels, and how much he is influenced by the conversation and sentiments of a beloved friend. The importance of this consideration

* Matt. v. 16.

is peculiarly seen in every case of reproof. The difficulties which usually attend the administration of reproof, and its frequent want of efficacy and success, are subjects of complaint in the mouth of every thinking man. All these difficulties plainly lie in the character, either of the reprover or the reproofed. It is indispensable, that the reprover, if any hope be entertained of success, be regarded as a friend; and that he assume the lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, and forbearance of the gospel. Such is the character of the Christian in the eye of his fellow-Christian; and such is the disposition with which his reproofs will be administered. They will therefore have all the advantage furnished by the fact, that they are derived from the best source.

At the same time, religion prepares the person who is to be reproofed in the best manner to receive this office of friendship. It teaches him his own frailty, the guilt and danger of backsliding, the absolute necessity of reproof to himself, as well as to others, the obligations which his fellow-Christians are under to administer it, the benevolent ends which it is designed to answer, and the peculiar friendship employed in reproving agreeably to the injunctions of the gospel. Thus the Christian is by his disposition prepared to discern, that 'the reproofs of instruction are the way of life;' and thus 'a reproof entereth more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool.'

Nor is the Christian less fitted to derive instruction, improvement, and enjoyment from other religious communications. By a kind of instinctive application he makes the cases, views, and feelings of his fellow-Christians his own. From their dangers he learns the means of safety to himself. From their backslidings he derives watchfulness. From their victories he acquires courage. Their fortitude, patience, and resignation he transplants into his own life. In their faith and hope, their comfort and joys he exercises an evangelical communion, which makes them all his own. In their sorrows also he experi-

ences a refined and affectionate interest, springing from the very nature of Christian sympathy, and rendering him better and lovelier whenever it is experienced. In this manner, while on the one hand his heart is softened and purified, he acquires on the other the rare and difficult science of regulating the affections, and directing wisely the conduct to which they give birth.

2. *Notwithstanding this sameness of character, the views of different Christians concerning the same objects, and the emotions excited by them, are in many respects different.*

It is a remarkable fact, that in the creation and providence of God, we find no two beings or events exactly alike. In this diversity, God undoubtedly designed to exhibit the endless diversities of beauty and utility existing in his own endlessly various wisdom; so that every thing might, in some respect, be a new display of his perfect character. In nothing is this variety more conspicuous than in rational minds. These undoubtedly differ not a little in their original structure, and vary unceasingly in their views, affections, and efforts. The very optics of the mind, although possessing the same common nature, are nevertheless so diverse from each other, as to see the same objects in lights often widely different, and to rest on very different parts of each individual object. Let any two persons who have been employed in contemplating the same subject, or viewing the same object, recite their respective views; and this difference will be strongly evinced. All these varieties are also predicable of the human heart. Affections very variously modified are continually awakened in different persons by the same events, even when they have the same common interest. The compassion excited by a scene of distress in a company of friends or neighbours, is proved by their own expressions to have many diversities of shade and character.

All these varieties of thought, feeling, purpose, and exertion are found every where in Christians, with respect to every religious subject. From this fact it

has been often, but rashly, concluded, that men were so made, as necessarily to form inconsistent views of the same doctrine or the same precept; and hence an apology has been made for error, which is intended to excuse it from criminality, and to quiet the minds of men, when chargeable with false religious opinions. This scheme attributes to God such indifference to truth, or such love to falsehood, as to have induced him to make men incapable, either from their nature, or from their circumstances, of discerning truth, and avoiding error. It is fairly presumable, that those who hold this scheme are not intentionally guilty of charging God thus foolishly.

But although God has not made the reception of error necessary, he has plainly formed us so as to receive truth, perhaps necessarily, certainly in a manner highly advantageous to us as social beings, in an unceasing diversity of lights. In a careful investigation of a complicated subject, it is not improbable that of a thousand persons thus employed, every individual would discern something not discerned by the others, and that something true and just. Every thing in the character of man, in his understanding, affections, and habits, contributes to this diversity.

Let me illustrate this subject by a familiar, and at the same time unobjectionable example. There are in the Scriptures, perhaps one hundred writers and speakers, all of whom have spoken truth only; while each has yet uttered it in his own characteristic manner. How universally various are these manners, and how much additional beauty, force, and profit are in this way added to the truth in the mind of every reader! Luke, Paul, and John are the most voluminous writers in the New Testament; and have communicated the greatest number of doctrines and precepts to mankind. How unlike each other are these writers, in their several modes of viewing the interesting subjects which they communicate to mankind. Paul and John, particularly, are remarkably eloquent and sublime, as well as remarkably in-

structive. Yet how different is the simple, artless gentle manner of John, from the bold, ardent, abrupt manner of Paul! Both at the same time are pre-eminently impressive, useful, and happy.

All Christians have their peculiar views of divine subjects, and their peculiar affections. All these also, when just and true, have their own peculiar utility. In the familiar intercourse of Christians these views are continually interchanged, and these affections mutually communicated. By this interchange, the views of all become more just, more expanded, more noble. The varieties of divine excellence, the multiplied relations of divine truth, and the endless modifications of duty, are in this way far more extensively perceived by every one than would otherwise be possible. The difference between the knowledge thus imbibed, and that which would be gained by a Christian in absolute solitude, is substantially the same with that, which exists between a savage, and a man educated in enlightened society.

Nor is this mutual communication of affections less improving. Piety, benevolence and self-government are capable of being endlessly modified. In a solitary mind it is impossible, in the present state of man, that they should fail of being sluggish, contracted, austere, or in some other unhappy manner defective. Even where persons of the *same sect, class, or character*, consort with each other only, a narrow-minded, prejudiced, bigoted, and often very censurable spirit is diffused, cherished, and confirmed. An expansive correspondence among Christians, on the contrary, enlarges the heart, exalts its feelings, and dignifies its designs. Let it be remembered, that to this immense good every Christian may contribute, whatever is his station, whatever the extent of his talents, and whatever the characteristical tenor of his affections. The greatest may learn and amend by the assistance of the least; the wisest, by that of the most uninformed. Thus, 'as iron sharpeneth iron, so every Christian sharpeneth the countenance of his friend,' Prov. xxvii. 17.

3. *The affections of Christians are strongly invigorated by their frequent intercourse with each other.*

Social beings are formed in such a manner as to be easily and deeply interested in each other's concerns ; and to share in each other's hopes and fears, joys and sorrows. Naturally, and in a sense instinctively, we love when others love, and hate when others hate ; exult in their prosperity, and mingle our sighs and tears with theirs. Whenever these emotions are communicated, they are caught. Heart, in this case, beats in regular response to heart ; and the bosom spontaneously heaves, and glows, and throbs, at the call of those by whom we are surrounded. All this is continually seen in the common occurrences of life ; particularly in the zeal of parties, the agitations of political assemblies, and the distracted violence of tumultuous crowds. Much more delightfully is it exhibited in the more rational and affectionate meetings of friends, and far more delightfully still in the intercommunion of Christians, the best of all friends. Here the noblest subjects engage the attention, and the most interesting of all concerns engross the heart : concerns, approved by the conscience, and approved by God. In their nature they are fraught with peace ; in their progress they are sources of unceasing and immortal good. To every person in such an assembly, ' the wisdom which is from above,' is the supreme object of pursuit ; that ' godliness, which has the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come.' In the pursuit of this glorious object, full of comfort, hope, and joy, the best emotions which can be felt by the human heart are awakened and reciprocated. The flame which glows in one breast is caught and kindled in another. The light which illumines one mind, sheds its lustre over all the minds by which it is encircled. The soul, raised above itself by this happy communion, feels that it ' has passed from death unto life, because it loves the brethren.' On such an assembly the Spirit of grace fails not to shower his balmy influence, and to awaken in the

minds of which it is composed, delightful anticipations of future glory. Peace, and hope, and joy, descending from above, scatter here their richest blessings ; and with a divine enchantment raise up a transient but delightful image of heaven on this side of the grave.

REMARKS.

1. *These observations teach us the invaluable blessing of being born in a Christian land.*

In such a land, all these advantages are primarily obtained. There Christians live. There religion is manifested in the life and conversation. There its reality, dignity, solemnity, and loveliness are seen by the eye, and declared to the ear. There ‘ the words of the wise are as goads.’ They counsel, exhort, reprove, and alarm with evangelical power. The minds of sinners are there awakened in this manner to a sense of their guilt, and urged, by motives of singular import, to listen to the alarming denunciations of offended justice, and to the delightful invitations of boundless mercy. There the worth of the soul, its immortal being, and its amazing destinies, are explained and understood. There the charms of a religious example are displayed and felt. There, of course, man is taught, allured, and compelled to provide for his eternal welfare.

In other lands how dreadfully reversed is the scene ! What a bleak and barren wilderness, what a dreary solitude, does their moral state present to the compassionate eye ! Stretch the wings of your contemplation, and pass over them with a momentary, but painful survey. From climate to climate, not a house of God is presented to your eyes ; not a pious family, not a religious example. Listen. No voice of prayer rises on the winds. No notes of prayer are wafted to the heavens. Look. No sabbath smiles with peace and mercy on the desolate waste. No dews of divine grace, no showers of life-giving rain, descend on the sterile soil. ‘ The heaven over their heads is brass : the earth under their feet is iron.’

2. *The same observations teach us the peculiar blessing*

of being born in a religious family.

In such a family religion lives and prospers, is visible and powerful, in a still more emphatical manner. It is seen always ; it is seen in the most beautiful attitudes, and the fairest colours. It is seen with an influence peculiarly persuasive and heavenly.

In their morning and evening devotions piety begins and closes the day ; prepares the heart to go patiently, serenely, faithfully, and gratefully through its active concerns ; and the eyes to close in peace, and to enjoy the sleep of such as are beloved by God. The interval between these solemn seasons is filled up with successive acts of justice, truth, and kindness to others, and to the happy circle where they originate ; and with a watchful, assiduous, and faithful superintendence of themselves. In the blessings of their intercourse with others, all around them successively share ; while their friends and neighbours are delighted, strangers are welcomed, and their enemies are not excluded. The poor and suffering not only make peculiar claims, but find those claims cheerfully admitted.

With each other, life is only a sweet interchange of lovely affections, and evangelical offices ; and assumes an aspect on which angels would smile with complacency, and heaven descend in a shower of blessings. Every day which passes over their heads calls forth from them all new displays of evangelical love, new efforts to make each other happy. Every place furnishes them new opportunities of shewing how much 'more blessed it is to give, than to receive.' But the sabbath, of all days, surrounds them with peculiar lustre and loveliness. Of all places, the sanctuary most unfolds their excellence, sublimates their virtues, and prepares them to meet 'the assembly of the first-born.'

How can those who are young grow up in such a family, in the midst of such conversation, by the side of such examples, and in the sight of such excellence hourly displayed, and fail of becoming wise ! The example is that of parents ; the most venerable, and

the most impressive which in this world was ever presented before the eyes. The excellence is that of brothers and sisters ; the most lovely, the most alluring, which is found below the sun. Must not ' the angels of the Lord encamp round about ' such a family ? Will not God behold them with uninterrupted and unclouded smiles ? Who can be a witness of the piety, the benevolence of such a family, and not exclaim,

' Thus on the heav'nly hills
The saints are bless'd above ;
Where joy like morning dew distils,
And all the air is love ?'

3. *These observations teach us the wisdom and goodness of Christ in establishing a church in the world.*

The church is one great family, in which all Christians are united, and enabled to walk together, and derive wisdom from each other. Here their correspondence is intimate, and their advantages are all concentrated. Their instructions. their reproofs, their prayers, their **example** are here mutually exhibited and mutually enjoyed. Here also these blessings are perpetuated. Religion here is visible from day to day, and from age to age ; and piety and beneficence shine, like the sun, with perennial beams.

The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. The Lord hath chosen Zion ; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever ; here will I dwell. I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation ; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.'

In this assembly of the faithful, the word and worship of God, the means of eternal life, and the religion of the gospel, have all been preserved. By the example, the labours, the prayers, and the piety of the church in one land, and in one age, have piety and salvation been extended and perpetuated, through other lands and other ages. This is the

stem, from which have sprung all the blossoms and fruits of righteousness which have gladdened this desolate world. Here sinners in millions have seen, felt, and acknowledged the reality and power of religion ; and under its divine influence have ' turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.' *Of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her. The Lord shall count, when he writeth in the people, that this man was born there.*

4. We hence learn also how important it is, that Christians should adorn their profession with a holy life and conversation.

Considerations very numerous and highly interesting urge the performance of this duty. On this occasion I shall, however, omit them all, except those which have been insisted on in this discourse. These ought to be more than sufficient for a design so strongly commended by its own inherent importance, and so necessary to peace of mind, and the final approbation of God.

If religion be not fervent in the heart, it will not be conspicuous in the life. If it be not conspicuous in the life, saints will not be edified, and sinners will not be saved.

A dull, cold, stupid heart, and its necessary consequence, a dull, cold, and stupid life, a life resembling more that of a heathen moralist, than that of a disciple of Christ, robs a Christian of his proper usefulness, prevents the comfort which he might enjoy, and overcasts his brightest hopes of future acceptance. I speak of this man as a Christian ; for such Christians there are. Such there were in the church of Sardis ; on whom Christ calls to ' strengthen the things which remained which were ready to die.' Nay, there are churches of this character. At Sardis there was such a church. But all persons of this character, whether churches or individuals, are mere burdens upon the kingdom of Christ ; heavy weights, under which Christianity struggles, and languishes, and faints. Their profession is so extensively contradicted by their life, as to wound

every good man, and to provoke the censure, scorn and ridicule of every bad one. Not only is their own profession esteemed insincere, and themselves regarded as hypocrites ; but Christians universally are scandalized for their sakes, and their religion pronounced to be a farce, a pretence, a cheat. The injury done in this manner is incalculable. Instead of improving at their side, in the enjoyment of their communion, and by means of their example ; Christians learn from them only to be dull and slothful, as *they* are ; to languish in all their duty ; and, although they have ‘ a name to live,’ to become the subjects of such a benumbing torpor as is scarcely distinguishable from the chill of death.

In the mean time, unrenewed men, discerning the mighty difference between the religion, described and required in the gospel, and that, which is displayed in the lives of such professors, not unnaturally, though very unhappily, conclude, that practical religion is no where to be found. To induce this conclusion, such examples need not be very numerous ; but, whenever they become frequent, it is drawn of course. Thus by a lukewarm life, and a profession violated by stupidity and negligence, the hearts of Christians are broken, and the salvation of sinners prevented. Vice and infidelity, in the mean time, rear their heads in triumph. ‘ The ways of Zion mourn, because few come to her solemn feasts,’ and the path to heaven is trodden only by here and there a solitary traveller. He who would not be chargeable with the guilt of effectuating these deplorable evils, must ‘ awake to righteousness ;’ must watch, and strive, and pray alway ; must resolve to do ‘ whatever his hand findeth to do with his might ;’ and must remember, that *the day* is approaching, when ‘ every man’s work shall be made manifest : for that day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire.

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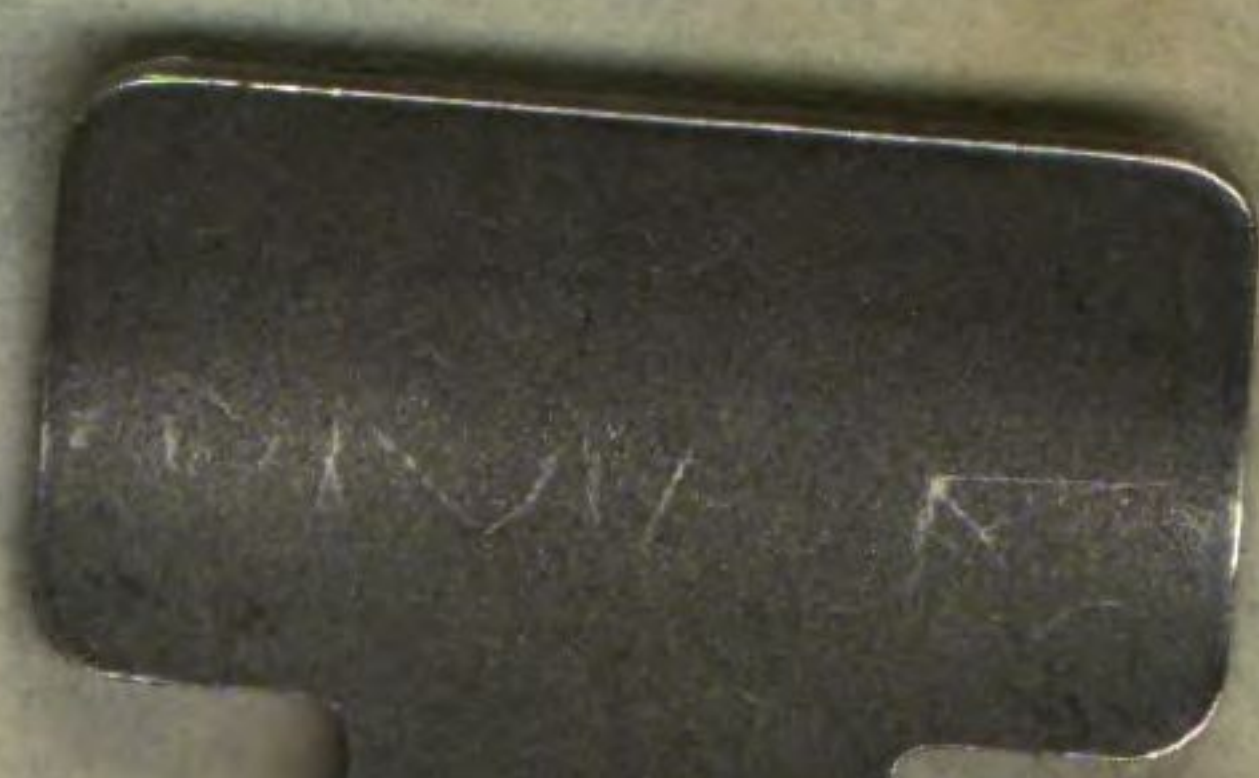
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